

SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

BISHOP OF LONDON.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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SERMONS

SEVERAL SELECTED

BY THE REV. J. H. W. HARRIS

BEING A COLLECTION OF

THE MOST IMPORTANT

VOLUME THE SECOND



LONDON

Printed for J. C. ADAMS, and J. HARRIS, in the

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to the General, in the Strand, 1795.

TO

THE HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
DR. SHUTE BARRINGTON,

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED;

AS A MARK

OF THE ESTEEM AND AFFECTION

ENTERTAINED FOR HIM

BY THE AUTHOR;

AND AS A MEMORIAL

OF THAT ENTIRE AND UNINTERRUPTED FRIENDSHIP

WHICH HAS NOW FOR NEAR THIRTY YEARS

SUBSISTED BETWEEN THEM.

A 2

TO

THE MEMORIAL AND RIGHT REV. BISHOP

OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN AMERICA

FOR THE PURPOSE OF

THE REV. BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN AMERICA

OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN AMERICA

FOR THE PURPOSE OF

BY THE AUTHORITY OF

AND AS A MEMORIAL

OF THAT BISHOP AND HIS RIGHT REV. BISHOP

WHICH HAS NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME

PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC

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REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS: AND
AGAIN I SAY, REJOICE.

AMONG the many expedients put in practice by the enemies of our Religion, to obstruct its progress, and to counteract its influence, it is no uncommon one, to set before the eyes of mankind a most frightful picture of Christianity, and to represent it as a stern, austere, uncomfortable, gloomy religion, adverse to all the innocent enjoyments of life, and to all the natural desires and propensities of the human mind. As a proof of this, we are referred to those injunctions of mortification and self-denial, of penitence, contrition and remorse, of abstinence from pleasure and enmity to the world, which occur sometimes in the sacred writings; and to those seasons,

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which,

which, in conformity to the spirit of such injunctions, have, by the authority of particular churches, been set apart for the purposes of retirement and abstinence, recollection and devotion. That precepts of this import are to be found in the Gospel, and that they carry with them some appearance of rigour, we do not deny. But it requires only a very small share of discernment to perceive, and of candour to acknowledge, that this is nothing *more* than appearance. It is very true, it is not to be diffembled; the Gospel does most certainly require us to renounce some things, which the man of the world may not be very willing to part with. But what are these things? They are those lusts which war against the soul: they are those selfish desires, which contract, and narrow, and harden the heart: they are those hateful and turbulent passions, which fill the mind with disquiet, and the world with disorder: they are those predominant vices and follies, those dangerous and destructive amusements, which destroy all composure of mind, all purity of sentiment and dignity of conduct, and plunge us in expence, dissipation, and ruin. These are the things we are required to mortify,

S E R M O N I.

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to deny, to subdue, to repent of, to renounce ; and if these are the hardships complained of, to these indeed we must submit. But to accuse the Gospel of severity on this account, would be just as rational and as equitable as to charge the surgeon with cruelty for amputating a gangrened limb, or the physician with ill-nature for prescribing a strict regimen and a course of searching medicines to a patient bloated with disease. We have reason on the contrary to bless the skilful hand, that, by any operations, however painful, by any remedies, however unpalatable, condescends to preserve or to restore the health of the soul. The truth is, the very cruelties of Christianity (if they may be called so) are tender mercies. Far from inspiring gloom and melancholy, or rendering our existence uncomfortable, they are, in fact, the only solid foundation of true chearfulness. Of all men living, those are the most wretched and comfortless, who are the slaves of their passions. Slavery of every kind, and this above all others, has a natural tendency to debase and degrade the soul, and to render it abject, mean, and spiritless. And till (as the Gospel

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requires)

requires) we have resolutely emancipated ourselves from this wretched state of spiritual servitude, we must never hope for any lasting peace or tranquillity of mind. Chearfulness is the privilege of innocence and virtue. The vicious and impenitent have no pretensions to it. They may, indeed, have transient gleams of gaiety and mirth : but these are far different from that calm, serene, and constant sunshine, which religious chearfulness sheds over the soul. The sorrows of repentance may sometimes cast a temporary shade around it ; but it soon breaks out again with redoubled splendour. “ Heaviness may endure for a night, “ but joy cometh in the morning.” The struggle with our depraved appetites may, perhaps, for a time, be painful enough ; but if we quit ourselves like men, it will soon be decided in our favour ; and then all our difficulties are at an end. From that moment, “ the “ ways of Religion are ways of pleasantness, “ and all her paths are peace.” Christianity excludes us from no rational, no harmless enjoyment. It does not spread before us a delicious banquet, and then come with a “ touch “ not, taste not, handle not.” All it requires is,

is, that our festivity degenerate not into intemperance; our amusements into dissipation; our freedom into licentiousness. Though it bids us “not to love the world” extravagantly, nor “to conform to it” criminally, yet it no where enjoins us to flee from it; but rather, after the example of our blessed Lord, to live in it, and to overcome it. A sullen, solitary, indolent retirement, is far from being conformable to the true spirit and temper of our religion, which is active, lively, and animated throughout. Consider its precepts, consider the example of those who taught it, and you will find that the predominant quality in both is an **UNIFORM, UNREMITTED, CHEARFULNESS.** John the Baptist, it is true, the precursor and herald of the Gospel, assumed the appearance of austerity and rigour. He came, “neither eating nor drinking. He lived in “the wilderness, had his raiment of camels hair, and a leathern girdle about his “loins, and his meat was locusts and wild “honey.” A very proper demeanor this for him, whose province it was to prepare the minds of men for the Gospel by repentance and self-denial, to till and dress the soil, to kill

in it every rank and noxious weed, to render it clean and pure, and moist with the tears of contrition, fit for the reception of that good seed which his illustrious follower was in a short time coming to sow in it. When HE appeared, the scene was changed. The Saviour of the world came (as he himself is pleased to express it) "eating and drinking." He came with all the marks of good-humour and good-will to men. He went to marriage feasts. The very first miracle he worked was, to promote their chearfulness: and he mingled in those happy meetings with so much ease and freedom, with so little affectation of moroseness or reserve, that his enemies gave him the name (a name which he treated with the most sovereign contempt) "of a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber *; a friend of publicans and sinners." Every mark of respect and attention that was shown him, he accepted with the most engaging and graceful condescension; nor did he even disdain the rich perfume, which the liberal hand of Mary poured upon him, notwithstanding the ill-timed murmurs of his more fastidious followers. Al-

* Matth. xi. 19.

though

though he himself, by his own example, plainly countenanced the practice of fasting at proper times, and under proper restrictions, yet he would not suffer his disciples to fast while he was with them. The time would come, he told them, when they would have abundant occasion to fast. But when the bridegroom was with them, they ought to know nothing but joy; and that joy should not be interrupted by unseasonable severities and anticipated sorrows. He reprov'd the hypocritical Pharisees for the ostentatious sadness of their countenances on such occasions; and enjoined his own followers, whenever they *did* practise an extraordinary abstemiousness, to preserve even in the midst of their humiliations, their wonted neatness of attire and chearfulness of appearance. "The hypocrites," says he, "disfigure
" their faces, that they may appear unto men
" to fast: but thou, when thou fastest, anoint
" thine head and wash thy face; that thou
" appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy
" Father which is in secret: and thy Father,
" which seeth in secret, shall reward thee
" openly *." His discourses were of a piece

* Matth. vi. 17.

with his deportment: they were soothing, comfortable, refreshing. The form of words, which he made use of generally when he cured diseases, was, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." He was constantly endeavouring to support the drooping spirits of his disciples by the most encouraging expressions; and when he found himself at length obliged to explain to them the hardships they were to undergo for his sake, the conclusion was, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world *."

The same spirit diffused itself to the apostles, evangelists, and disciples, who maintained, throughout the whole course of their ministry, a certain vigour and vivacity of mind, which no calamity could depress. Their writings are full of exhortations "to rejoice evermore; to show mercy with cheerfulness; to count it all joy, even when we fall into temptation." The language of the text, the language of the whole Gospel, is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Hence it is plain, that a constant cheerfulness

* John xvi. 33.

is the distinguishing character of the Christian religion: that it animated both the precepts and the conduct of those who taught it, and was considered by them as a necessary concomitant in the performance of every part of our duty.

But the Gospel does not stop here. It not only *commands* us to be chearful; this it might very easily do; but what is of still more importance, it assists us in becoming so; it affords the best and most effectual helps toward obtaining that happy and satisfied temper, that constant serenity and composure of mind, without which all the wealth and grandeur of the world are insipid and worthless things.

I. The first assistance of this kind it gives us is, that constant and enlivening employment which it finds for our thoughts. The human mind, we all know, is restless and active; and if not otherwise engaged, will turn its activity inward, will prey upon and devour itself, and become the destroyer of its own happiness. A very large proportion of the evils which press the heaviest upon us, are purely imaginary, are the creation of our own hands, and arise from no other cause than the having nothing else to
do,

do, but to sit down and make ourselves as miserable as we possibly can. One great means, therefore, of promoting chearfulness is, to keep our thoughts constantly and usefully employed. The pursuit of any important and worthy object is in itself enlivening. Every advance we make in it, is a new accession of pleasure: we feel ourselves animated with a growing delight; and go on with encreasing ardour and alacrity to the attainment of the end we have in view. A succession of worldly pleasures and occupations may, for a time, engage our attention; but that delusion is soon over, and they leave a void behind which nothing can fill up, but those great and noble purposes of action which the Gospel presents to our minds: the conquest of our passions; the improvement of our nature; the exaltation of our affections; the diffusion of happiness to every human being within our reach; the attainment of God's favour and protection here, and of everlasting glory and happiness hereafter. These are objects worthy of a rational and immortal being; these will find ample employment for all the faculties and powers of his mind; and the higher his rank and abilities are,

are, the more will his duties multiply upon him, and the sphere of his activity enlarge itself. Whoever, in short, engages in earnest in the Christian warfare, whoever presses on with zeal and ardour towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and "forgetting those things that are behind, reaches forth to those that are before," will never find either his attention or his spirits droop. He will be continually animated with new prospects, elated with new acquisitions, rewarded with new triumphs, and will know nothing of that languor and flatness, that gloom and melancholy, which are so apt to seize upon unoccupied minds.

II. Whoever suffers himself to be brought under the dominion of any malignant passion, envy, malice, hatred, jealousy, or revenge, must, from that moment, bid adieu to peace and cheerfulness. These odious tyrants are all most fatal enemies to our repose. They throw the mind into a perpetual ferment and agitation; they harraßs it with a succession of malevolent sentiments and vindictive designs; they keep it in a constant fever of resentment, and allow it no rest. The man possessed by these

these wicked spirits "sleeps not, except he has done mischief: his sleep is taken away, unless he cause some to fall *." Every one must see, that a state of mind like this must exclude all enjoyment of life; must produce a sullen gloominess of disposition, which no ray of cheerfulness can penetrate or enliven.

When, therefore, Christianity exhorts us to put away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, and malice," it prescribes one most effectual remedy against disquietude and dejection of mind. And when it further recommends, in the room of these passions, to substitute sentiments of mercy, kindness, meekness, gentleness, compassion, brotherly affection, charity; when it commands us to feed the hungry, cloath the naked, visit the sick, and pour oil into the wounds of the afflicted and distressed, it points out to us the most effectual means, not only to make others happy, but ourselves also.

In fact, true Christian charity, in all its extent, is a never-failing fund of pleasure to the soul. The joy resulting from the diffusion of blessings to all around us, is the purest and

* Prov. iv. 16,

sublimeſt that can enter the human mind, and can be conceived only by thoſe who have experienced it. Next to the conſolations of divine grace, it is the moſt ſovereign balm to the miſeries of life, both in him who is the object of it, and in him who exerciſes it; and it will not only ſoothe and tranquillize a troubled ſpirit, but inſpire a conſtant flow of good humour, content, and gaiety of heart.

III. Another ſource of chearfulneſs to be found in the Goſpel is, that moſt comfortable doctrine of a particular Providence, which is there ſet forth in the cleareſt and moſt unequivocal terms. It is impoſſible for any thinking man, who ſuppoſes that the world, and all its affairs, are under no other direction than that of chance and fortune, to enjoy any true and permanent tranquillity of mind. There is ſuch a variety of miſeries to which human nature is continually expoſed, and which no human prudence can either foreſee or avert, that, without a firm confidence in ſome powerful ſuperintendent, who is both able and willing to protect us, we muſt live under perpetual apprehenſions for ourſelves and thoſe who are moſt dear to us. From this moſt
painful

painful solicitude (which was, in fact, a source of endless uneasiness to the Pagan world) the Gospel effectually relieves us. It informs us, that we are under the constant guardianship of an Almighty Friend and Protector, who sees the very minutest events, and governs the most casual; who, in the immense range of creation, does not overlook the least or meanest of his creatures; who commands us "to take no thought for the morrow," but to cast all our care upon him, for this most substantial and satisfactory reason, "because he careth for us;" who has declared, that, "if we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, all those things (that are really necessary) shall be added to us;" and that, in the great variety and seemingly discordant mixture of human events, "he will make every thing work together (ultimately) for good to them that love him *." Here, now, is a firm and adequate foundation for enjoyment of the present moment, and indifference about the next. Under the persuasion that no disaster can reach us without his permission, who watches over us with an eye that never slumbers, and a tender-

* Matth. vi. 34; 1 Pet. v. 7; Rom. viii. 28.

ness which nothing but guilt can withdraw from us, we can face those unknown terrors from which Pagan Philosophy turned away dismayed; can look forward, unmoved, into futurity, and contemplate all the possible contingencies that may befall us with intrepidity and unconcern; with the cheerfulness of a mind at perfect ease, reposing itself in full confidence and serenity on the great Disposer of all human events.

IV. That future state of existence, of which Christianity first gave us a clear and distinct view, affords a prospect to us that cannot well fail to cheer and enliven our hearts, and even bear us up under the heaviest pressures of affliction. Without this support, there are, it must be owned, calamities sufficient to break the highest spirits, and to subdue the firmest minds. When the good and virtuous man is unjustly accused and inhumanly traduced; when enemies oppress and friends desert him; when poverty and distress come upon him like an armed man; when his favourite child, or his beloved companion, is snatched from him by death; when he is racked with incessant pain, or pining away with incurable disease; when he knows, moreover, that he
can

can have no rest but in the grave, and supposes that this rest is the absolute extinction of his being; no wonder that he sinks into melancholy and despair. But let the divine light of immortality break in upon him, and the gloom that surrounds him clears up. Let this day-star arise before him, and it will shed a brightness over the whole scene of his existence, which will make every thing look gay and chearful around him. He is no longer the same being he was before. A new set of ideas and sentiments, of hopes and expectations, spring up in his mind, and represent every thing in a point of view totally different from that in which they before appeared to him. What he had been accustomed to consider as insupportable misfortunes, he now sees to be most salutary chastisements. This world is no longer his home. It is a scene of discipline, a school of virtue, a place of education, intended to fit him for appearing well in a far more illustrious station. Under this conviction he goes on with alacrity and steadiness in the paths of duty, neither discouraged by difficulties, nor depressed by misfortunes. He is a citizen of a heavenly country, towards which
he

he is travelling: his accommodations on the road are sometimes, it must be owned, wretched enough; but they are only *temporary* inconveniencies; they are trivial disquietudes, which are below his notice; for *at home* he knows every thing will be to his mind. The blessings which there await him, and on which his heart is fixed, inspire him with an ardour and alacrity that carry him through every obstacle. Even under the most calamitous circumstances, he supports himself with this reflexion, more pregnant with good sense and solid comfort, than all the vast volumes of ancient Philosophy or modern Infidelity, that “these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for him (if he bears them with Christian patience) “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.”

V. There remains still another ground of joy peculiar to the Gospel; and that is, the consolation and assistance of the Holy Ghost. It is a circumstance of wonderful beauty and utility in the Christian dispensation, that one of those three divine persons, who each bore their share in the great work of our redemption, condescends

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

to contribute also to our present tranquillity ; to abide with us here constantly upon earth ; to assume the endearing name, and perform the truly benevolent office, of a COMFORTER. Under this character and title, the Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles by our Saviour, in his last affecting address to them, in order to alleviate their grief for his approaching departure. This promise was most punctually and amply fulfilled on the day of Pentecost ; and from that time we see the influence of this heavenly Paraclete most eminently displayed in that astonishing and almost instantaneous turn which it gave to the sentiments, the language, and the conduct of the apostles. From being timorous, dejected, and perplexed, shocked at the ignominious end of their Lord, afraid to appear in public, dubious, hesitating, and indecisive ; on a sudden they become courageous, undaunted, chearful. They openly avow, and boldly preach, that once offensive doctrine of a crucified Saviour. They profess themselves his disciples : they call upon all men to believe in him ; and set before them, with all the powers of the most masculine eloquence, the evidences and the doctrines of the Christian faith.

faith. No complaints from that time; no dejection of spirits; no discontent. Though they were persecuted, afflicted, tormented, yet it was all joy, and triumph, and exultation of heart.

"We are troubled," says St. Paul, "on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, but not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things; and though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day*." Even St. Peter himself, he who had the weakness to deny his blessed Master in the extremity of his distress; even he, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, was the very first to rise up in his defence, and in a long and spirited speech to vindicate his pretensions, and assert the truth of his doctrines. The same alacrity and joyfulness spread itself to all the converts. "For they that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need; and continuing daily with one

* 2 Cor. iv. 16.

“ accord in the temple, did eat their meat
 “ with *gladness* and singleness of heart, prais-
 “ ing God, and having favour with all the
 “ people*.”

Such were the chearful scenes which the first dawn of the Gospel, and the first appearance of the Comforter, present to us: and although these were, indeed, preternatural effects, arising from such extraordinary effusions of the Spirit, as were peculiar to those times, and not to be expected in our own; yet, in some degree, his sacred influence will still remain; and to every one that is worthy of his consolations, he will still be a Comforter. We are assured by the best authority, “ that
 “ he will abide with us for ever; that he will
 “ dwell with us; that he will be with us
 “ always to the end of the world; that the
 “ fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace; that
 “ the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace,
 “ and joy in the Holy Ghost †.” If, therefore, we constantly and devoutly pray for his divine assistance; if we do not grieve him by

* Acts ii. 46, 47.

† John xiv. 16; Rom. viii. 9; Math. xxviii. 20; Gal. v. 22; Rom. xiv. 17.

any sinful thoughts and actions; if we endeavour, by the most unblemished purity of mind and sanctity of life, to render ourselves fit temples for him to inhabit; we may depend upon it that he will be our guide and companion, our comfort and support; will, in temptation, give us fortitude, in affliction patience, in prosperity thankfulness, in poverty content; will, in every condition and circumstance of life, impart to us that PEACE OF GOD, that heartfelt joy and satisfaction, which passes all understanding and all description.

Before I conclude, I must beg your attention to one short, but, as I conceive, important observation, resulting from the foregoing discourse.

We of this kingdom have been repeatedly stigmatized by the other nations of Europe as a melancholy, dejected, gloomy people. The charge, I fear, is upon the whole but too well founded; and the proofs too visible, and sometimes too dreadful to be evaded or denied. It behoves us therefore, surely, to enquire a little into the true causes of this national malady; and to consider, whether *one* of these causes may not be a contemptuous

disregard, or, at least, a cold indifference for that most pure, and holy, and enlivening Religion, which contains the only true remedy for our disease. Instead of this, we have too commonly recourse to a very different mode of relief, to those pernicious cordials of unbounded pleasure and endless dissipation, which, though like other cordials, they may raise our spirits for the moment, yet afterwards sink and depress them beyond recovery, and leave the unhappy patient infinitely more in distress and danger than they found him. If this be the case, we know what we have to do. We must fly to a totally opposite regimen; to that purity of mind, that sanctity of manners, that self-government, that moral discipline, that modesty of desire, that discreet and temperate enjoyment of the world, that exalted piety, that active benevolence, that trust in Providence, that exhilarating hope of immortality, which the doctrines and the precepts of the Gospel so powerfully impress upon our souls, and which, as we have seen, are the best and most powerful preservatives against all depression of spirits. It is here, in short, if any where, true chearfulness is to be found. To those,
indeed,

indeed, who have been long dissolved in luxury and gaiety, that moderation in all things which Christianity prescribes, may, at first, appear a harsh and painful restraint; but a little time, and a little perseverance, will render it as delightful as it is confessedly salutary. Be prevailed on then, for once, to give it a fair trial; and accept, with all thankfulness, that most gracious invitation of our blessed Redeemer, "Come unto me all ye that labour
" and are heavy laden, and I will give you
" rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn
" of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls,
" For my yoke is easy, and my burthen is
" light *."

* Matth. xi. 28—30.

SERMON II,

I COR. i. 20.

WHERE IS THE WISE? WHERE IS THE
 SCRIBE? WHERE IS THE DISPUTER OF
 THIS WORLD? HATH NOT GOD MADE
 FOOLISH THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD?

THE subject on which St. Paul is speaking in this chapter, and which drew from him the exclamation in the text, is the doctrine of the Cross; that is, the atonement made for the sins of mankind by the crucifixion of our blessed Lord. This is a topic on which he always speaks with an air of peculiar triumph and exultation: and in this chapter more especially, he enlarges upon it with unusual strength of argument and eloquence. He was not ignorant that this doctrine gave the utmost offence both to the Jew and to the Greek: but notwithstanding this, he asserts, "that it was the power of God
 + " unto

“unto salvation*.” He was no stranger to the numberless objections made to it by the profound reasoners and the fashionable philosophers of the age, who are here distinguished by the appellation of the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world; but their wisdom, their learning, their skill in disputation, had no weight with him. He considered their idle cavils and subtilties as utterly unworthy of his notice. He affirmed, that their boasted science and erudition never had been, never could be, of the least use to mankind, in leading them to the knowledge and practice of true Religion; “and that the world by wisdom, (by *such* wisdom as they possessed) “knew “not God:” whereas, what *they* called the “foolishness of preaching†,” the foolishness of preaching the great doctrine of Redemption, had already enlightened the minds, and reformed the hearts of a prodigious number of people, and thus made “foolish the wisdom of “this world;” had shewn the weakness and impotence of worldly wisdom, when compared with the rapid and astonishing effects produced by the so much derided doctrine of Re-

* Rom. i. 16.

† 1 Cor. i. 21.

demption.

demption. Transported with these ideas, the apostle breaks out into the sublime apostrophe of the text: "Where is the scribe? where is the wise? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

Since the time of this great apostle, his argument, drawn from the inefficacy of Rabbinical learning and Gentile philosophy, compared with the consequences of the Christian revelation, has acquired additional force by the propagation of the latter, and the reformation wrought by it through a large part of the world, and the light diffused by it into almost every other part; whilst the wise and the disputers of this world have never been able to work any considerable change in the dispositions and manners of a single city, or even a single village, throughout the earth. Yet, notwithstanding this apparent superiority, there are not wanting persons who are full of objections to the Gospel of Christ; and especially to that capital and fundamental article of it, of which we have been speaking, *the doctrine of atonement* by the death of Christ.

If (say these disputers) it was God's purpose to rescue mankind from the dominion
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and the punishment of sin, what need was there of so many strange expedients, and such a long course of laborious and uncouth arrangements, for the accomplishment of this design? What necessity was there, that no less a person than the Son of God himself, should be sent from Heaven to this lower world to take upon him our flesh; that his very birth should be a contradiction to the common course of nature; that he should be allied to mean and indigent parents, live for many years an obscure life, then go about preaching a new Religion, full indeed of excellent precepts, but abounding also with mysterious, and unintelligible, and seemingly useless doctrines; that he should go through a long series of indignities and sufferings, which he might easily have avoided; should at length submit to a most painful and ignominious death; should afterwards rise from the grave, ascend into Heaven, there sit down at the right hand of God, and then send another divine person, called the Holy Ghost, to finish what he had left undone?

What necessity, it is asked, could there possibly be for such a complicated piece of mechanism

chanism as this ; for such a multiplicity of instruments, and such a variety of contrivances, as are here set in motion, to effect one single, and, to all appearance, very easy purpose, the pardon of a few wretched criminals? Why could not God have done this at once, by one decisive and gracious exertion of mercy and of power ; by publishing, for instance, an act of general indemnity and oblivion for past offences, on condition of sincere repentance and amendment of life? Is not this a plain, simple, and natural manner of proceeding, and far more worthy of the wisdom and the majesty of the Supreme Being, than that intricate, operose, and circuitous kind of process in the work of our Redemption, which the Gospel ascribes to him?

In answer to all these specious cavils, it might be sufficient to say, " Who art thou, O " man, that repliest against God?" Shall the sinner that is saved, say to him that redeemed him, Why has thou redeemed me thus? " As " well might the thing formed, say to him that " formed it, Why hast thou made me thus *?" Objections of such a nature, and from such a

* Rom. ix. 20.

quarter, prove nothing more, than that man is as presumptuous as he is ignorant and weak.

That the method which God made use of to redeem man by the death of Christ, is very different from that which a modern Philosopher would have made use of, may be very safely admitted, without in the least impeaching either the propriety or the wisdom of that method. That God's proceedings are always infinitely wise, is most certain; but he does not conduct himself on the principles of mere human wisdom. "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." It is not always in man to perceive the fitness of those means which God makes use of to obtain his ends; though there can be no doubt but they are the fittest that could have been imagined. Who could have supposed, that the way to exalt Joseph to the highest pinnacle of worldly grandeur and prosperity, was to sell him as a slave to a company of travelling Ishmaelites*? What apparent proba-

* In this, and perhaps one or two other places, a few remarks from other authors have, I believe, (in the course of my reading many years ago) insensibly mingled themselves with my own. But who those authors were, I cannot at this distance of time distinctly recollect.

bility was there, that Goliath, the great champion of the Philistines, should fall by the hand of a stripling, unused to arms, and furnished only with a stone and a sling? How indignant was the mighty Syrian, Naaman, when he was told, that, in order to be cured of his leprosy, he must wash himself seven times in Jordan? He expected something very different from this. "Behold, I thought," says he, "that the Man of God will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean *?" So reasoned this wise man; and so would any other wise man of modern times have reasoned on this occasion. But it proved in this, as it will in every other instance, "the foolishness of God was wiser than men; and the weakness of God was stronger than men †." He washed in Jordan, and was clean.

Nay, even in the ordinary course of God's providence, what a number of things do we

* 2 Kings v. 11.

† 1 Cor. i. 25.

see conducted in a manner totally different from what one should naturally expect? To instance only in that daily bread, which is the chief support of life. How comes it to pass, may the disputers of this world say, that so much trouble and pains are requisite to produce so essential an article for our sustenance as this? What occasion can there be, that it should go through so tedious a process, such a long train of preparatory operations, before it becomes fit for use? How strange does it seem, that the grain, which is to be our food, should first of all be buried in the ground; there remain for some time invisible and useless, and apparently dead §; then spring forth with fresh life, and in a new form; arrive, by

§ *Apparently dead.* The sacred writers say, that the grain actually dies *: and Voltaire, in his *Questions sur l'Encyclopedie* †, triumphs not a little in this supposed error. But a much better physiologist than Mr. Voltaire (I mean Mr. Bonet, of Geneva) affirms, that the position may be justified as philosophically true. The exterior integument of the grain does most certainly corrupt and die. It is the germ only, or principle of vegetation, which remains and lives. “L'Enveloppe du grain perit, & de son interieur sort une plante bien differente de cette enveloppe.”

Essai Analytique, &c. par Mr. Bonet, & Bibliotheque des Sciences, 1771. Prem. part. p. 145.

* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

† Article Agriculture.

slow degrees, to a state of maturity, and afterwards employ a prodigious number of hands; undergo a great variety of changes, and assume many different appearances, before it can be manufactured into that solid substance, which affords so much strength and nourishment to man? Might not Providence have obtained the same end by much more obvious and expeditious means? Might not our daily bread be rained down upon us at once from Heaven, like the manna of the Israelites; or be made to vegetate on trees, as is the case in some parts of the southern hemisphere, where nature has left no other trouble to man but to gather his bread and eat it, whilst we are forced to labour after it through innumerable difficulties and delays? These questions are just as modest and as proper as those we are apt to ask concerning the mode of our Redemption. And as we find that Providence has not thought fit to humour our prejudices, and conform to our ideas, in the one case; why should we expect it in the other? We may, in both cases, with equal truth and justice, say, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is

“ the disputer of this world? Hath not God
“ made foolish the wisdom of this world * ?”

But let us descend a little more to particulars.

We are told, that, to save mankind from the punishment due to their sins, the promulgation of a free pardon, on the part of God, would have been fully sufficient.

Let us suppose then for a moment, that this had actually been the case. Let us suppose, that the Son of God, or some other divine messenger, had been sent on earth merely to tell mankind, that they need be under no apprehensions about the consequences of their sins, for that they would all be freely forgiven; and that, provided they behaved better for the future, they would be received into the favour of God, and rewarded with everlasting life. What do you think must have been the consequence of such a general unqualified act of grace and indemnity as this? Would it not have given the world reason to imagine, that God was regardless of the conduct of his creatures, and that there was little or no danger in transgressing his laws?

* 1. Corinth. i. 20.

Would

Would not this easiness of disposition, this facility in pardoning, have given men encouragement to continue in their sins; or, at least, to have returned in a short time to their favourite and long-indulged habits, in a certain expectation of meeting with the same gentle treatment which they had already experienced? And does not every one see, that this would have quickly extinguished all the little remains of virtue that were left in the world? There was, indeed, I allow, some ground to hope, that a God of infinite mercy and goodness would find out *some* means of saving a guilty world from destruction. But no man of common sense could imagine, that he would do this in such a manner as should be inconsistent with his other attributes; those attributes, which are as essential to his nature as his goodness and his mercy; I mean, his justice, his wisdom, his authority, as the moral governor of the universe. All these must have been shaken to their very foundation, had he pardoned mankind without some satisfaction made to him for their disobedience; without some mark of his abhorrence stamp'd upon guilt; without some public ex-

ercise of his coercive power, which might prevent the sinner from flattering himself, that he might go on transgressing with impunity, and might safely presume on the mercy of God, even in prejudice to the great ends of his moral government.

But repentance, you say, would of itself have answered all these purposes; would have been a sufficient atonement for past offences, a sufficient satisfaction to God's justice, and a sufficient security to the sinner against the future effects of God's displeasure.

Admitting all this for a moment to be true, there is still another question of some importance to be asked and answered, and which yet is commonly quite left out of the account. What reason have you to think, that had Christ done nothing more than offered to the Heathen world a free pardon of their sins, on condition of repentance, they would have accepted and performed that condition; in other words, that, without some signal indication of God's abhorrence of sin, to strike their imagination, to affect their hearts, and rouse their consciences to a just sense of their guilt, they would ever have repented at all?

Consider only for a moment what the condition of mankind was, when our Lord made his appearance on earth. Their corruption and profligacy had grown to so enormous an height, and ran out into such a variety of horrible vices, as even in these degenerate days would appear shocking and portentous. They were, as St. Paul assures us, in a letter addressed to those very Romans of whom he is speaking, “ they were filled with all un-
“ righteousness, fornication, wickedness, co-
“ vetousness, maliciousness; full of envy,
“ murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whif-
“ perers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful,
“ proud, boasters, inventors of evil things,
“ disobedient to parents, without understand-
“ ing, covenant breakers, without natural af-
“ fection, implacable, unmerciful *.”

What now do you think of such a race of monsters as these? Do you think it possible, that mere exhortation alone, or even the most awful denunciations of punishment, would ever have brought such miscreants as these to real repentance and vital reformation? What little probability there was of this, you will judge

* Rom. i. 29, 30, 31.

from what St. Paul further tells you in the same epistle, that they not only did these things themselves, but took “pleasure in those
 “that did them *.” They were delighted to see their friends, their neighbours, and even their own children, grow every day more profligate around them. “They became vain in their
 “imaginations, and their foolish heart was
 “darkened †.” “They were alienated from
 “the life of God, through the ignorance that
 “was in them, because of the blindness of
 “their heart; they were past feeling, and
 “gave themselves over unto lasciviousness, to
 “work all uncleanness with greediness ‡.” This shews, that the number and the grossness of their crimes had effaced all their ideas of guilt, and “had seared their consciences with
 “a hot iron §.” Add to this, that their philosophers and their priests, who ought to have restrained their vices, did themselves, by their own example, encourage them in some of their worst. Many parts even of their religious worship, instead of purifying and reforming, tended to corrupt and debase their hearts with

* Rom. i. 32.

† Rom. i. 21.

‡ Eph. iv. 18, 19.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 2.

the grossest sensualities ; and the very gods whom they adored were represented as guilty of crimes too shocking to be specified, but which all who sought their favour would certainly take care to imitate *. You see then what little prospect there was, that men under such circumstances should ever be prevailed on, by a mere preacher of righteousness (even though sent from the realms, and endued with the eloquence, of Heaven) to repent and reform. Before they could do either, they must be sensible that they were acting wrong. But they, on the contrary, thought themselves right. They not only acted wickedly, but acted so on principle. Their moral sense was inverted. “ The light that was in them was “ become darkness.” They had no check within to stop their mad career of wickedness ; and every thing without, every thing that ought to have taught them a better lesson, their philosophers, their priests, their religion, their worship, their gods themselves, all contributed to confirm and strengthen them in their corrupt practices, and to bar up every avenue to reformation.

* Ego homuncio hoc non facerem ? See the whole passage. Terent. Eun. iii. v. 43.

It is therefore evident, that, without some awakening call, some striking, and astonishing, and extraordinary event, (like that of the crucifixion of Christ) to affect the hearts and alarm the fears of the ancient Pagans, and to impress them with a strong sense of God's extreme indignation against sin, it was morally impossible they could ever have been brought to a serious, effectual, and permanent amendment of heart and life *.

It is in vain then to talk of the great efficacy of repentance in averting the anger of the Almighty, and atoning for past offences. You ought first to settle the previous question, whether, if this *had* been all the expiation required, there would have been any repenting sinners in the world to have tried the experiment?

* It is a singular circumstance, which I have from unquestionable authority, and which tends very much to show the powerful influence of a crucified Redeemer, that in almost every part of the world, from Greenland to the West-India islands, those Heathens that have been profelyted to Christianity were principally and most effectually wrought upon by the history of our Saviour's sufferings, as recorded in the Gospel. When these were forcibly stated, and repeatedly impressed on their minds, they scarce ever failed to produce in them both a lively faith and a virtuous life.

But

But to grant all this power of expiation to repentance, is granting a great deal more than truth will warrant.

For from whence do you learn, that repentance alone will obliterate the stains of past guilt; will undo every thing you have done amiss; will reinstate you in the favour of God: will make ample satisfaction to his insulted justice; and secure respect and obedience to his authority, as the moral governor of the world?

Do the Scriptures teach you this? No. They plainly tell you, that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins*.” But, perhaps, you collect it from the very nature of the thing itself. Consider then what repentance is. It is nothing more than sorrow for what we have done amiss, and a resolution not to do it again.

But can this annihilate what is past? Most assuredly it has no such power. Our former transgressions still remain uncanceled. They are recorded in the books of Heaven; and it is not our future good deeds alone that can wipe them out. They can only answer for

* Heb. ix. 22.

themselves,

themselves, (if they can do that): they have no superabundant or retrospective merit to spare, as a cover to past offences. We may as well affirm, says a learned divine, that “our former obedience atones for our present sins, as that our present obedience makes amends for antecedent transgressions.”

If you think this doctrine harsh and unnatural, see whether your own daily experience, whether the ordinary course of human affairs, will teach you a different lesson.

Look around you, and observe what is passing every moment before your eyes. You see men frequently destroying by sensuality, by intemperance, by every act of profligacy, their health, their fortune, their character, their happiness here and hereafter. You see them, perhaps, afterwards most heartily sorry for what they have done; sincerely repenting of their wickedness; resolving for the future to lead a virtuous and religious life, and perhaps fulfilling that resolution. But does this always restore to them their health, their fortune, or their good fame? No: they are often gone for ever, lost beyond redemption, notwithstanding their utmost efforts to recover them.

them. The wretch that has committed a murder, may be struck with the deepest remorse and horror for his crime, and may most seriously determine to make every amends for it in his power. But does this save him from the hand of justice, from the punishment denounced against his offence by law? We know that it does not. Unless some powerful mediator or friend interpose to obtain his pardon, he will fall by the hand of the executioner. And in a multitude of other instances, nothing but the generous kindness of our friends, and their readiness to encounter great inconvenience, expence, trouble, and misery, for our sakes, can avert the fatal consequences which our indiscretions, follies, and vices would, in spite of the sincerest repentance and remorse, infallibly bring upon us *. Since then, notwithstanding

* It is remarkable, that our Lord himself compares his interposition to save us from ruin to the generous interference of a man to rescue his friend from destruction. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends §;" alluding, evidently, to this instance of his love for us. This, perhaps, might suggest the idea of that noble principle of analogy, by which Bishop Butler has so admirably illustrated, and so unanswerably defended the great Scriptural doctrine of our Redemption, by Christ interfering

§ John xv. 13.

ing the mercy and the goodness of God, repentance does not prevent the natural penal consequences of our crimes in this world; what reason is there to think, that it will avert the vengeance due to them in the next, which is under the government of the same Almighty Being?

That it is incapable of producing this effect, will appear further from the consideration, that the sincerest repentance and reformation must necessarily be in some degree imperfect, mixed with failings, and subject to occasional relapses; and therefore, instead of atoning for past transgressions, must themselves stand in need of, indulgence and forgiveness. If repentance placed us in a state of moral perfection and unfinning obedience, there might be some pretence, perhaps, for ascribing to it a considerable degree of expiatory virtue. But let the truest and devoutest penitent look impartially into his own heart, and then let him fairly say, whether this is actually the case. Has he so completely washed his hands in innocence, and purified his soul from sin, that not a single evil pro-
as a friend in our behalf, and voluntarily substituting himself for us on the cross,

penalty

penfity remains within him? Has he entirely fubdued every inveterate habit, every inordinate paffion, every fin that did moft eafily befet him? Is it all calmnefs, compofure, peace and order within? Is all rancour and malice laid afleep in his breaft? Can he forgive the groffeft insults, the cruelleft calumnies, and the moft unprovoked injuries? Do his thoughts never wander beyond the limits of his duty, nor his eye delight to dwell on improper objects? Are his affections detached from this world, and fixed entirely on things above? Does his heart glow with unbounded love towards his neighbour, and is it touched with the hallowed flame of piety and devotion towards his Maker? When he can truly fay, that this is a genuine picture of his foul, he may then, if he thinks fit, reject a crucified Redeemer. But till then, he will do well not to lean too confidently on repentance as his *only* ftay.

If then neither Scripture nor experience teach us, that repentance alone will avail for our pardon from God, does the light of nature affure us that it will? To know what are the genuine dictates of nature, you muft
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not look for them in a land enlightened by Revelation ; you must go back to those ages, and those countries, where nature was, indeed, the only guide that men had to direct their ways. And what was then their opinion of the efficacy of repentance ? Did the antient Pagans entertain such high notions of it, as some theologians, in the present times, seem to have taken up ? By no means : we scarce ever hear *them* talking of repentance. When they had offended their gods, they thought of nothing but oblations, expiations, lustrations, and animal sacrifices. These were the expedients to which they always had recourse to regain the forfeited favour of their deities. This universal practice of *shedding blood* to obtain the pardon of guilt, most clearly shows what the common apprehensions of mankind were on this subject, when under the sole direction of their own understanding : it shows, they thought that something else was necessary, besides their own repentance and reformation, to appease the anger of their gods. They thought that, after all they could do for themselves, something must be done or suffered by some other being, before they could

be restored to the condition they would have been in if they had never forfeited their innocence. Nay, some of the greatest, and wisest, and best amongst them, declared, in express terms, "that there was wanting *some universal method of delivering men's souls*, which no sect of Philosophy had ever yet found out*."

This universal method of delivering men's souls, (as it is here most properly and most emphatically called) was at length made known to mankind by the Christian Revelation; and it is that very doctrine of Redemption which we have been here considering. Our blessed Lord was himself the great, the all-atoning victim, offered up for the whole world upon the cross. "He was wounded for our transgressions, and on him the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all †." "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness ‡." He was, in short, the very Paschal Lamb, which was slain for us from the foundation of the world. He was the great universal Sacrifice to which all the prophets, from

* Porphyry, as quoted by Austin de Civitate Dei. l. 10. c. 32.

† Isaiah liii. 5, 6.

‡ 1 Peter ii. 24.

the fall of Adam to the birth of Christ, uniformly directed their views and their predictions, and of which all the sacrifices under the Jewish law were only types and emblems. *They* were the shadow: Christ was the substance. And, as the writer to the Hebrews justly observes, “if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh;” (that is, released the offender from legal uncleanness and temporal punishment) “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God *?”

This is, in a few words, the sum and substance of the great mystery of our Redemption. That it is a mystery, a great and asto-

* Heb. ix. 13, 14.—The Socinians say, that the expressions in Scripture, which seem to prove the death of Christ to be a real sacrifice for sin, are nothing more than figurative allusions to the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic law. But it has been well observed, that the *very reverse* of this is the truth of the case. For these Mosaic sacrifices were themselves allusions to the great all-sufficient Sacrifice, which was to be made by our Saviour on the cross.

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nishing mystery, we readily acknowledge. But this was naturally to be expected in a work of such infinite difficulty, as that of rendering the mercy of God, in pardoning mankind, consistent with the exercise of his justice, and the support of his authority, as the moral Governor of the world. Whatever could effect this, must necessarily be something far beyond the comprehension of our limited understandings; that is, must necessarily be mysterious. And, therefore, this very circumstance, instead of shocking our reason and staggering our faith, ought to satisfy the one, and confirm the other.

What remains further to be said on this interesting and important subject, I shall reserve for a separate discourse.

SERMON III.

I COR. i. 20.

WHERE IS THE WISE? WHERE IS THE
 SCRIBE? WHERE IS THE DISPUTER OF
 THIS WORLD? HATH NOT GOD MADE
 FOOLISH THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD?

FROM the train of reasoning pursued in the preceding discourse, it has, I trust, been made evident, that, though repentance and reformation are without doubt indisputably necessary towards procuring the pardon of sin, (*so* necessary, that without them not all the sacrifices on earth, nor all the mercies of heaven, can avail to save us) yet they are not *of themselves* sufficient to wash away the stains of past guilt, to satisfy the justice of an offended God, and restore a wicked and rebellious world to his protection and favour.

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It appears, both from the nature of the things themselves, from the clearest deductions of reason, from the ordinary course of human affairs in the present world, from the common apprehensions, and the universal practice of mankind, before the appearance of Christ upon earth, and, above all, from the positive declarations of God himself, both in the Old and New Testament, that, besides the contrition of the sinner himself, something must be done or suffered by some other being on his account; some sort of expiation must be made for him, and accepted, before he can be exonerated of guilt, and redeemed from punishment, and stand justified in the eyes of his offended Maker.

This principle being established; (and it appears to me incontrovertible) who shall afterwards presume to say, that the particular kind of expiation, or, in other words, the particular mode of Redemption, which God actually fixed upon for the preservation of mankind, was not the best and fittest that could be devised? If *some* victim, *some* propitiatory sacrifice, was plainly necessary for this purpose; who shall undertake to affirm, that

that the very individual sacrifice appointed by God himself, was not the properest and most effectual to answer the end proposed? If commutative punishment and vicarious suffering appear not only to have prevailed among all Heathen nations from the earliest ages, and to have been established among the Jews by the express appointment of God, but even at this hour make a part of the ordinary dispensations of God's providence in the present world, (where we continually see men rescued from ruin by the interposing kindness, the generous exertions, and the voluntary sufferings of others on their account); who shall say, that there was either cruelty or injustice, in appointing Christ to die, much less in his voluntary consent to die, "for us men and for our salvation?" If, in fine, the value of the victim offered was usually proportioned to the magnitude of the offence, and the number of the offenders; why should it appear in the least incredible, that when the inhabitants of a whole world, (perhaps of many worlds and systems of worlds) and all their generations, from the very fall of our first parents to the end of time, were to be

cleansed from guilt, nothing less than the blood of the son of God himself, should be thought to possess sufficient purifying powers to wash away stains of so deep a dye, and so vast extent?

It is evident, then, that all the plausible objections of "the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world," against the Scripture doctrine of Redemption, founded on the nature of the sacrifice made by our Lord, on the dignity of his person, on the union of the divine nature with the man Christ Jesus, or any other circumstances of that nature, are utterly void of all foundation in truth, in reason, in experience, and in the actual course of human affairs in God's administration of the universe. We may, therefore, safely dismiss them without further notice: and may assume it as an undoubted truth, that though we ourselves could not, with our short-sighted faculties, discover the smallest traces of wisdom or propriety in the Redemption of the world by the death of Christ, yet that it is in fact the wisest that could be chosen; that the difficulties attending it arise only from that impenetrable darkness which surrounds the throne of the

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Almighty,

Almighty, and must necessarily rest on many of his works, both of nature and of grace; and that it is, notwithstanding, as the Scripture most accurately and sublimely expresses it, "the wisdom of God in a mystery *." Yet still, by contemplating this mystery attentively, we may, even with our limited understandings, discover some marks of divine wisdom; some reasons, which might induce the Almighty to prefer this method of redeeming the world to any other; reasons sufficient at least to show, that when the veil is wholly withdrawn, when we no longer "see through a glass darkly," but are admitted to contemplate "in open day" the whole plan and the entire system of our redemption, we shall have as much reason to reverence the depth of the counsels of the Almighty, as we confessedly have, even at present, with all our ignorance, and all the natural obscurity of the subject, to adore his goodness.

Out of many of these marks of divine wisdom, in the mode of our Redemption, which might be produced, I shall select only a few of the most important,

* 1 Cor. ii. 7.

I. In the first place, it has often been, and cannot be too often, remarked, that the atonement made on the cross for the sins of man, removed a difficulty, which "the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world," with all their wisdom, were never able to surmount. It reconciled a contradiction, which to every human understanding appeared insuperable. It reconciled the mercy and the justice of God in his treatment of mankind. It gave salvation to a guilty world, without either inflicting on the offenders the punishment justly due to their offences, or giving countenance and encouragement to sin. By accepting the death of Christ instead of ours, "by laying on him the iniquity of us all," God certainly gave us the most astonishing proof of his mercy: and yet, by accepting no less a sacrifice than that of his own Son, he has, by this most expressive and tremendous act, signified to the whole world such extreme indignation at sin, as may well alarm, even while he saves us, and make us "tremble at his severity, even while we are within the arms of his mercy*."

* Scott's Christian Life, b. 3.

II. The

II. The appearance of Christ in the form of man, and the death he suffered for our sakes, did not only make our peace with God, but it also enabled him to afford us the strongest possible proof of that most comfortable doctrine, our resurrection from the dead, by his own return to life again after lying three days in the grave. It was, therefore, a most eminent proof of divine wisdom, that the very same event, the death of Christ, should answer two such important purposes; should both afford us the means of reconciliation with God, and at the same time give birth to another great event, which fills us with the joyful hope and the certain expectation of everlasting life. Nay, even the public and ignominious manner in which our Lord expired, and which has sometimes been a ground of objection and of reproach, was in reality an additional indication of divine wisdom. For had our Lord's death been less public and notorious, and had his person been in his last moments less exposed to the observation of mankind, the proof of his resurrection from the dead would have been considerably weakened. Had his death been private and silent,
and

and after the ordinary manner of men, the reality of it would very soon have been questioned; and consequently his resurrection would have been represented as a gross fraud and a scandalous imposition on the credulity of mankind. But his crucifixion in the face of day, and in the presence of an immense concourse of people, took away every pretence of this nature, and gave a strong and irresistible confirmation to the truth of that astonishing miracle which followed; which is the foundation of all our hopes, and the great corner-stone of our whole Religion.

III. Before the appearance of our Saviour on earth, there was a notion universally prevalent in every part almost of the known world, that sin could no otherwise be expiated than by animal sacrifices. And this at length was carried so far, that in some extraordinary cases it was thought that the death of brute animals was not sufficient. Human sacrifices became necessary; and the more near and dear the person sacrificed was to them, the more valuable was the offering thought; so that they frequently slaughtered their sons and daughters, more especially their first-born, on the
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the altars of their gods. Now the death of Christ, at the same time that it was a gracious condescension to the prevailing opinion of the necessity of sacrifice, put an entire end (through a great part of the world) to that sanguinary species of devotion, by rendering it totally useless and inefficacious. For "Christ was offered once for all; by one offering he perfected for ever them that are sanctified *;" and obtained, by one single act, that which mankind had, from the beginning of the world, been endeavouring in vain to accomplish, by innumerable and continual sacrifices, namely, the pardon of their sins, and reconciliation with God. After this universal and effectual expiation, no other was of the least use or value. Accordingly, in every country that embraced the Gospel, all sacrifices, both animal and human, immediately ceased; and a sudden and absolute period was put to that incredible effusion of blood, which had deluged the world almost from the very creation down to that time.

IV. At the same time, that the sacrifice made by Christ upon the cross put an end to

* Hebrews x. 10. 14.

all other sacrifices, it gave (what they could never give) *an absolute certainty* of pardon, on the condition of repentance and reformation of life. This it was impossible that any one could rationally expect from the slaughter of an innocent animal, much less from that of a human being. Both these acts seemed, in themselves, rather calculated to increase guilt than to take it away. God might, indeed, if he pleased, accept the commutation of one life for another; and it was on this presumption that the Heathen world adopted the custom of sacrifices. But this was certainly a mere presumption. Without an express revelation of the divine will in this respect, no one could be absolutely sure that such a substitution would be accepted. But God has now actually declared in the Gospel, that he does accept the death of Christ as a propitiation for our sins. And to put this beyond all doubt, he has ratified and confirmed that acceptance by a public, significant, and decisive act of approbation, the act of raising him from the dead.

V. The death of Christ is also a seal and confirmation of the new covenant betwixt God and man.

For

For it was the custom of almost all ancient nations, both Jews and Gentiles, to ratify their treaties and covenants by sacrifices. Of this you may see instances in various parts of Scripture *, and in several Heathen historians †. In condescension therefore to the manner of men, and to confirm their faith in his promises, God did, by the sacrifice of Christ, seal and ratify his new covenant of mercy with mankind; upon which account the death of our blessed Lord is called (as the Jewish sacrifices also were) *the blood of the "covenant" ||.* This, therefore, is another excellent purpose answered, by that method of redeeming us which God was pleased to fix upon: that it is conformable to all those federal rights by which men were wont to confirm their covenants with each other; and thus gives us every possible assurance, not only by words, but by the most expressive actions, that God will perform all his gracious promises made to us in the Gospel, provided we fulfil the conditions on which alone those promises are made.

* Gen. xv. Jerem. xxxiv. † Livy, lib. i. c. 24. &c. &c.

|| Heb. x. 29; xii. 24. Ex. xxiv. 8.

These are *some* of the reasons which might possibly induce our Maker to fix on the death of his Son as the best method of redeeming mankind; and there may be, and undoubtedly are, many other reasons for that choice, unknown to us, still more wise and more benevolent than those already specified. Yet these are abundantly sufficient to convince us, that the Redemption wrought for us by Christ upon the cross, carries in it the plainest marks of divine wisdom.

Still, however, it may be urged, and it often is urged with great confidence, that even admitting the force of every thing here said, admitting the necessity of *some* sacrifice for the expiation of sin, and a sacrifice too of great value and dignity; yet after all, it seems utterly incredible; that the death of no less a person than the Son of God himself should be necessary for this purpose; and that he, in whom all the fulness of the godhead dwelt, should ever consent and condescend to become that sacrifice, and to expire in agonies on the cross for such a creature as man, who occupies so small and seemingly so inconsiderable a place in the immensity of the universe.

There

There is undoubtedly something very astonishing in this circumstance. But there are not wanting considerations, which may, in some degree, tend to account even for this acknowledged difficulty.

In the first place, there is a very extraordinary personage mentioned in Scripture, whose existence it is the fashion of the present day to doubt and to deride, and to explain away some of the most striking effects of his power into allegory, metaphor, vision, and imagination. He is, notwithstanding, described by the sacred writers in the plainest and the clearest terms, and represented as a being of high rank, of great power, and prodigious art and strength. The names there given him are, Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil, and the Prince of the Devils; and he appears to be in a state of perpetual hostility against God and Christ, and this lower world, over which he has very considerable influence. He is described by our Saviour under the image of a *strong man**, whom it was necessary to bind before you could spoil his house. He is called the Prince of the Power of the Air§; the Prince of this World||;

* Matth. xii. 29. § Ephes. ii. 2. || John xii. 31.

and,

and, by St. Paul, the God of this World *. He is represented as being at the head of a numerous and formidable host of wicked spirits; to whom St. Paul gives the title of principalities, and powers, and rulers of this world §. And in another place they are said to be his angels †. To this malignant and insidious Being was owing the fall of our first parents, and all the tragical consequences of that fatal event, the introduction of death and sin, and every kind of natural and moral evil, into the world. On these ruins of human nature did this tremendous Spirit erect his infernal throne, and established an astonishing dominion over the minds of men, leading them into such acts of folly, stupidity, and wickedness, as are on no other principle to be accounted for; into the grossest superstitions, into the most brutal and senseless idolatry, into the most unnatural and abominable crimes, into the most execrable rites and inhuman sacrifices ‡. Nay, what is still more

* 2 Cor. iv. 4. § Ephes. vi. 12. † Matth. xxv. 41.

‡ Nothing less than diabolical influence can account for the almost universal custom of human sacrifices, and the atrocious outrages on all decency perpetrated in some of the sacred rites of Egypt, Greece, and Hindostan. See *Maurice's Indian Antiquities*, vol. 1. p. 256, 274.

deplorable

deplorable, he gave the finishing stroke to the disgrace and humiliation of mankind, by setting up *himself* as the object of their adoration, and that too (to compleat the insult) under that very form which he had assumed to betray and to destroy them; I mean that of the serpent: the worship of which disgusting and odious animal, it is well known, prevailed to an incredible degree in almost every part of the Pagan world, and is still to be found in some parts of Africa *. In this manner did Satan lord it over the human race, till our blessed Saviour appeared on earth. At that time his tyranny seems to have arrived at its utmost height, and to have extended to the bodies as well as to the souls of men, of both which he sometimes took absolute *possession*; as we see in the history of those unhappy persons mentioned in Scripture, whom we call Demoniacs, and who were truly said to be *possessed* by the devil. It was therefore neces-

* See Bryant's *Antient Mythology*, vol. i. *de ophiolatria*.—A serpent was adored in Ægypt as an emblem of the divine nature; and in Cashmere there were no less than 700 places where carved figures of snakes were worshipped. *Maurice's Indian Antiquities*, vol. i. p. 291.—At Whydah, on the Gold Coast, a snake is the principal object of worship. See *Evidence on the Slave Trade*.

fary, in order to accomplish the complete Redemption of mankind, to subdue in the first place this their most formidable and determined enemy, to destroy his power, to overthrow his kingdom, and to rescue all the sons of men from that horrible and disgraceful state of slavery, in which he had long held them enthralled. Now to execute a work of such magnitude and such difficulty, some agent of extraordinary rank, and extraordinary authority and power, was plainly necessary. Such a personage was our blessed Lord; who therefore spontaneously undertook, and successfully accomplished, this most arduous enterprize. The very first preparatory step he took before he entered on his ministry was, to establish his superiority over this great enemy of the human race, which he did in that memorable scene of the temptation in the wilderness. And throughout the whole of his future life, there appears to have been a constant and open enmity and warfare between Christ and Beelzebub, between the Prince of this world and the Saviour of it, between the Powers of Darkness and the Spiritual Light of the world, between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Jesus.

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When all this is taken into consideration, it will no longer be a matter of surprize, that the eternal Son of God himself should condescend to come among us, unworthy as we are of such a distinction. For nothing less than his almighty power could probably have vanquished that dreadful adversary we had to deal with, and whose defeat and humiliation appear to have been essentially necessary to our salvation*.

There is still another consideration which merits some regard in this question.

It is, I believe, generally taken for granted, that it was for the human race alone that Christ suffered and died; and we are then asked, with an air of triumph, whether it be conceivable, or in any degree credible, that the eternal Son of God should submit to so much indignity and so much misery for the fallen, the wicked, the wretched inhabitants of this small globe of earth, which is as a grain of sand to a mountain, a mere speck in the universe, when compared with that immensity of worlds, and systems of worlds,

* See John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11. 2 Cor. iv. 4. Ephes. ii. 2; vi. 12. Col. ii. 15.—“Through death, he destroyed him that had the power of death; that is, the devil.” Heb. ii. 14.

which the sagacity of a great modern astronomer has discovered in the boundless regions of space*.

But on what ground is it concluded, that the benefits of Christ's death extend no further than to ourselves? As well might we suppose, that the sun was placed in the firmament merely to illuminate and to warm this earth that we inhabit. To the vulgar and the illiterate, this actually appears to be the case. But Philosophy teaches us better things. It enlarges our contracted views of divine beneficence, and brings us acquainted with other planets and other worlds, which share with us the cheering influence and the vivifying warmth of that glorious luminary. Is it not then a fair analogy to conclude, that the great *Spiritual Light of the world*, the Fountain of life, and health, and joy to the soul, does not scatter his blessings over the creation with a more sparing hand, and that the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in his wings to other orders of beings besides ourselves? Nor does this conclusion rest on analogy alone. It is evident from Scripture itself, that we are by no means the only creatures in the universe

* Dr. Herschell.

interested

interested in the sacrifice of our Redeemer. We are expressly told, that as "by him were
 " all things created that are in heaven and
 " that are in earth, visible and invisible ; and
 " by him all things consist : so by him also
 " was God pleased (having made peace through
 " the blood of his cross) to reconcile *all things*
 " *unto himself, whether they be things in earth,*
 " *or things in heaven :* that in the dispensation
 " of the fulness of times, he might gather to-
 " gether in one *all things in Christ, both which*
 " *are in heaven, and which are on earth, even*
 " *in him **."

From intimations such as these, it is highly probable, that in the great work of Redemption, as well as of Creation, there is a vast stupendous plan of wisdom, of which we cannot at present so much as conceive the whole compass and extent. And if we could assist and improve the mental as we can, the corporeal sight ; if we could magnify and bring nearer to us, by the help of instruments, the great component parts of the spiritual, as we do the vast bodies of the natural, world, there can be no doubt, that the resemblance and analogy would hold between them in this as

* Col. i. 16. 20. Eph. i. 10.

it does in many other well-known instances ; and that a scene of wonders would burst in upon us from the one, at least equal, if not superior, to those, which the united powers of astronomy and of optics disclose to us in the other.

If this train of reasoning be just, (and who is there that will undertake to say, much more to prove, that it is not so?) if the Redemption wrought by Christ extends to other worlds, perhaps many others besides our own ; if its virtues penetrate even into Heaven itself ; if it gather together *all things* in Christ ; who will then say, that the dignity of the agent was disproportioned to the magnitude of the work ; and that it was not a scene sufficiently splendid for the Son of God himself to appear upon, and to display the riches of his love, not only to the race of man, but to many other orders of intelligent beings ?

Upon the whole, it is certainly unpardonable in such a creature as man, to judge of the system of our Redemption, from that very small part of it which he now sees ; to reason as if we ourselves were the only persons concerned in it, and on that ground to raise cavils, and difficulties, and objections, and represent the
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the cross of Christ as foolishness, when, alas, it is we only that are foolish !

There may undoubtedly be many other ways in which the Redemption of man might have been effected. But this we are sure of, that the way in which it *is* effected, is the wisest and the best, for this plain reason, because the wisest and the best of Beings has chosen it. It has been shown, that even with our short-sighted faculties, and with our very imperfect knowledge of the subject, we can discover *some* reasons which might render this way of redeeming us preferable to any other ; and we have seen also, that it may have a relation to other beings, whose situation and circumstances, if fully and clearly made known to us, would probably furnish us with still stronger reasons to admire and adore the wisdom of God's proceedings towards his creatures. But even admitting, that the benefits of this most extraordinary dispensation were designed to reach no further than this world, and that Christ died solely "for us men, and for our *salvation*;" what other rational conclusion can be drawn from this supposition, than that we ought to be impressed with a deeper and

a livelier sense of his unbounded goodness to the children of men?

That the Son of God should feel such compassion for the human race, as voluntarily to undertake the great, and arduous, and painful task, of rescuing them from death, and sin, and misery; that for this purpose he should condescend to quit the bosom of his Father, and the joys of heaven; should divest himself of the glory that he had before the world began; should not only take upon himself the nature of man, but the form of a servant; should submit to a low and indigent condition, to indignities, to injuries and insults, and at length to a disgraceful and excruciating death, is indeed a mystery. But it is a mystery of kindness and of mercy; it is, as the apostle truly calls it, “a love that passeth knowledge*,” a degree of tenderness, pity, and condescension, to which we have neither words nor conceptions in any degree equal. It is impossible for us, whenever we reflect upon it, not to cry out with the Psalmist, “Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him†.”

* Eph. iii. 19.

† Psalm viii. 4.

And

And what effect should this reflection have upon our hearts? Should it dispose us to join with the disputer of this world, in doubting and denying the wisdom of the Almighty in the plan of our Redemption, and in quarrelling with the means he has made use of to save us, because they appear to our weak understandings strange and unaccountable? Shall the man who is sinking under a mortal disease, refuse the medicine which will infallibly restore him, because he is ignorant of the ingredients of which it is composed? Shall the criminal who is condemned to death, reject the pardon that is unexpectedly offered him, because he cannot conceive in what manner and by what means it was obtained for him? Shall we, who are all criminals in the sight of God, and are all actually (till redeemed by Christ) under the sentence of death; shall we strike back the arm that is graciously stretched out to save us, merely because the mercy offered to us is so great, that we are unable to grasp with our understanding the whole extent of it? Shall the very magnitude, in short, of the favour conferred upon us, be converted into an argument against receiving it; and

and shall we determine not to be saved, because God chuses to do it, not in our way, but his own?

That in this and many other instances his ways are mysterious, and past finding out, is undoubtedly true. But let it be remembered always, that the mysterious part relates only to what he has done for us; what we have to do (which is all that it concerns us to know) is perfectly clear and intelligible. It is nothing more than this, that we prostrate ourselves with all humility before the throne of grace, and adore the goodness of our Maker in consenting, on *any* terms, to extend his mercy to us; that we embrace, with gratitude and thankfulness, the great salvation offered to us by the death of Christ, and exert our utmost endeavours to render ourselves capable of sharing in the benefits of that sacrifice, by fulfilling the conditions, the only conditions, on which we can be admitted to partake of it; that is, “by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*.”

* Tit. ii. 12.

S E R M O N IV.

P S A L M iv. 4.

COMMUNE WITH YOUR OWN HEART, AND
IN YOUR CHAMBER, AND BE STILL.

TO commune with our own hearts is, in the language of Scripture, to retreat from the world, and give ourselves up to private meditation and reflection. But as the subjects of our meditation may be very different, in order to know what *kind* of self-communion is here meant, we must consider the purposes which the Psalmist had in view. These purposes are specified in the former part of the verse, "Stand in awe, and sin not;" to which is immediately subjoined, as the means of impressing this sacred awe upon the mind, "Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still." The design, therefore,

fore, of the self-communion here recommended is, to restrain us from vice; to cherish and improve the seeds of virtue; to give us leisure for examining into the state of our souls; to stamp upon our hearts a love for God and a reverence for his laws; to make us, in short, "stand in awe, and sin not."

Such is the purport of the injunction in the text; and a more important one it is not easy to imagine: it is, indeed, an essential and indispensable requisite towards our well-being, both here and hereafter. For if we will never stand still and consider, how is it possible we should ever go on well? Yet, notwithstanding the evident necessity of reflection to an intelligent and accountable being, a very large part of mankind seem to have formed a resolution never to think at all. They take the utmost pains that they may never experience the misfortune of finding themselves alone and still, may never have a single moment left for serious recollection. They plunge themselves into vice; they dissipate themselves in amusement; they entangle themselves in business; they engage in eager and endless pursuits after riches, honours, power, fame, every

every trifle, every vanity that strikes their imagination; and to these things they give themselves up, body and soul, without ever once stopping to consider what they are doing and where they are going, and what the consequence must be of all this wildness and folly. In vain does Reason itself sometimes represent to them, that if there really be another state of existence, it is insanity never to concern themselves about it: in vain does God command them "to watch and pray, and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling:" in vain does Religion call upon them to withdraw a little from the busy scene around them, to retire to their own chamber, to be there quiet and still, to commune with their own hearts, to prostrate themselves before God, to lament their sins, to acknowledge their wretchedness, and entreat forgiveness through the merits of their Redeemer. Against all these admonitions they shut their ears, and harden their hearts; and press forward with intrepid gaiety in the course they are embarked in, which they insist upon to be the only wise one. To that wisdom then, and the fruits of it, we must leave them, with our earnest prayers to

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God,

God, that they may see the things that belong to their peace before they are for ever hid from their eyes. But whatever may become of this giddy unthinking multitude, we, my brethren, who are brought here by a sense of duty, must see, that if we hope either to understand that duty, or to fulfil it, we must sometimes retire and think of it. Even the best and greatest of men, have found this self-communion necessary to preserve them from sin and error. The royal Psalmist more especially, who gave us the precept, enforced it powerfully by his own example. Though no one was more attentive to the interests of his people, and good government of his kingdom, had a greater variety of weighty objects to engage his thoughts, more difficulties to encounter, or more temptations to combat than he; yet he never suffered either business, grief, or pleasure, so *entirely* to possess his soul, as to exclude the great concerns of Religion; but wherever or however situated, he found time to commune with himself; he frequently retired at morning, and evening, and noon-day, to review his conduct, to examine into the state of his soul, and search out his spirits, to
bless

bles God for his past mercies, or implore his future protection. Those animated compositions he has left us under the name of Psalms, are, in general, nothing more than the fervent expressions of his piety on these occasions, the conversations he held with his own heart. It is in these he unbosoms himself without reserve, and pours forth his whole soul before God. We are admitted into the deepest recesses, and see the most secret workings, of his mind. We see him possessed alternately with hopes and fears, doubt and confidence, sorrow and joy; and agitated, by turns, with all those different passions and emotions, which the different aspects of his soul, on the most careful review, would naturally excite. By these well-timed retreats he prevented any presumptuous sin, if not from accidentally surprising him, yet at least from getting the dominion over him; and though he sometimes slept, and sometimes even fell, yet he instantly rose again, more vigorous and alert to the discharge of his duty.

But we have this practice of self-communion recommended to us by a still holier and brighter example, that of the blessed Jesus himself.

himself. The nature of his mission, indeed, and the boundless benevolence of his temper, necessarily led him to mingle in society; to listen to every call of humanity; to go about doing good, healing diseases, relieving infirmities, correcting errors, removing prejudices, forgiving sins, inculcating repentance; promoting piety, justice, charity, peace, harmony, courtesy, cheerfulness, amongst men; crowding, in short, into the narrow compass of his ministry, more acts of humanity and kindness, than the longest life of the most beneficent man on earth ever yet produced. Yet, in this active course of life, we find him frequently breaking away from the crowds that surrounded him, and betaking himself to privacy and solitude. The desert, the mountain, and the garden, were scenes which he seemed to love, and with which he took all opportunities of refreshing himself; purchasing them sometimes even at the expence of night-watches, when the day had been wholly taken up in the offices of humanity, and the business of his mission. Here it was he spent whole hours in pious contemplation and fervent prayer; in adoring the goodness of God to
mankind,

mankind; in expressing, on his own part, the utmost submission to his divine will; in reviewing the progress, and looking to the completion, of the great work he had undertaken; in confirming his resolutions, and strengthening his soul against the severe trials he was to undergo in the prosecution of it. From these retreats, and these holy meditations, he came out again into public, not gloomy and languid, not disgusted with the world and discontented with himself, but with recruited spirits, and a redoubled ardour of benevolence; prepared to run again his wonted course, and to pour fresh benefits and mercies on mankind.

If then not only the pious author of the text, but the divine Author of our faith himself, found retirement and recollection necessary to the purposes of a holy life, there can be little doubt of its use and importance to all that are desirous of treading in their steps. But I shall endeavour to shew still more distinctly the advantages attending it, by laying before you the following considerations; considerations, which the present holy season*, set apart

* This Sermon was preached at St. James's Chapel on the first day of Lent, Feb. 6, 1788.

for the practice of this very duty, will, I hope, assist in pressing home upon your hearts.

I. In the first place, it is a truth too notorious to be denied, and too melancholy not to be lamented, that the objects of sense, which here surround us, make a much deeper impression upon the mind than the objects of our faith. And the reason is plain. It is, because the things that are temporal are *seen*; are perpetually soliciting our senses, and forcing themselves upon our observation; whilst the things that are eternal, merely because they are not seen, and therefore want the advantage of continual importunity and solicitation, have but little influence upon our hearts. It is, therefore, the first and most obvious use of retirement, to take off our attention from the things of this world, and thereby to destroy, for a time at least, their attractions. When they cease to be seen, or are seen only in imagination, they lose, in a great measure, their dominion over us. We can then contemplate them in their real forms, stript of that false glare with which they are apt to dazzle our eyes and mislead our understandings. We then plainly see, how little they can boast of intrinsic

fic worth, how much they owe to the warmth of fancy, the tumult of passion, the ardour of pursuit, and the hurry of the world. For as these causes no longer operate in the stillness of retirement, every charm that they bestowed drops off, and vanishes with them; the objects of our pursuit shrink to their proper dimensions; and we are amazed to see them reduced in an instant almost to nothing, and so little left of all that we gazed at with so much admiration, and followed with so much eagerness.

II. If at the same time that we recede from this world we turn our eyes upon the next, we shall reap a double advantage from our self-communion. By frequently meditating on the concerns of eternity, we shall begin to perceive their reality, and at last to feel their influence. Spiritual meditations are at first very irksome and disagreeable, not because they are unnatural, but because they are unusual. Give but the soul a little respite, a moment's breathing, from the incessant importunity of cares and pleasures, and she will almost naturally raise herself towards that heavenly country, where she hopes at last to find rest and happiness. Every faculty and power, both of

the body and mind, are perfected by use; and it is by the same means that the eye of faith is also strengthened, and taught to carry its views to the remotest futurity. By degrees we shall learn to allow for the distances of *spiritual*, as we do every day for those of *sensible*, objects; and, by long attention to their greatness, forget or disregard their remoteness, and see them in their full size and proportion. A taste for religious meditations will grow upon us every day; and, by constant perseverance, we shall so refine our sentiments and purify our affections, as to become what the Scriptures call *spiritually minded*; to live, as it were, out of the body; and to walk by faith as steadily and as surely as we used to do by sight.

III. Nothing is so apt to wear off that reverence for virtue, and abhorrence of vice, with which all well-principled men enter *into* the world, as a constant commerce *with* the world. If we have had the happiness of a good education, our first judgments of men and things are generally right. We detest all appearance of baseness, artifice, and hypocrisy: we love every thing that is fair, open, honest, and generous. But how seldom does it happen, that we carry these sentiments along with us,

us, and act in conformity to them, through life. How seldom does it happen, that we are proof against the freedom of conversation, or the contagion of example, which insensibly corrupt the simplicity of our hearts, and distort the uprightness of our opinions. We are aware, perhaps, of the open attacks upon our virtue, which every one may see, and guard against, if he pleases; but it is not every one that sees those more secret enemies, that are perpetually at work, undermining his integrity. It is scarce possible to be always with the multitude, without falling in with its sentiments, and following it to do evil, though we never intended it. The croud carries us involuntarily forward, without our seeming to take one step ourselves in the way that they are going. We learn, by degrees, to think with less abhorrence on what we see every day practised and applauded. We learn to look on bad examples with complacency; and it is but too easy a transition, from seeing vice without disgust, to practising it without remorse. We quickly find out the art of accommodating our duty to our interests, and making our opinions bend to our inclinations. We lose sight of the

honest notions we first set out with, and adopt others more pliant in their stead. The issues of life thus corrupted, the infection soon spreads itself to our actions. We are enslaved by habits, without feeling the chain thrown over us, and become guilty of crimes, which we once could not think of without shuddering. It is, therefore, of the last consequence, to step aside sometimes from the world, in order to compare our present way of thinking and acting with our past; to try and sift ourselves thoroughly; "to search out our spirits, and seek
" the very ground of our hearts; to prove and
" examine our thoughts; to look well, ex-
" tremely well, if there be any way of wick-
" edness in us; that if there be, we may turn
" from it into the way everlasting."

IV. As by frequently conversing with a man, we may gain a tolerable insight into his true temper and disposition; so a repeated communion with our own hearts brings us intimately and entirely acquainted with them; discovers to us their weak sides, their leading propensities, and ruling foibles. It lays open to us all their windings and recesses, their frauds and subtleties. We penetrate through
the

the thin covering of their fair pretences, into their real motives. We see, that in most cases it is hazardous to indulge their suggestions too easily and too often: we see, that one compliance only paves the way for a second, till we have it no longer in our power to refuse their solicitations. Hence we learn to be jealous of their encroachments, and to suspect their most specious proposals. We keep a strict eye over all their motions, and guard every issue of life with the utmost diligence. By tracing the progress of our passions on former occasions, and observing the fatal mischiefs that followed from suffering them to gain the ascendancy over us, we shall learn the proper art of managing and subduing them; we shall acquire that extremely necessary science of self-government, those admirable habits of prudence and circumspection, which, however by some men neglected and despised, we shall find to be exceedingly conducive to right conduct and real happiness. Without thus reflecting on our past miscarriages, and enquiring into their causes, we must for ever fall into the same mistakes, be deceived by the same appearances, surprized by the same artifices, and lose the

only consolation (poor as it is) which our past follies and transgressions can afford us, *experience*.

Such are the more general uses of religious retirement and reflexion : but they will have more peculiar advantages, according to the particular situation that we are placed in.

If Providence has cast our lot in a fair ground, has given us a goodly heritage, and blessed us with a large proportion of everything that is held most valuable in this world, rank, power, wealth, beauty, health, and strength ; though we may then, perhaps, be less *disposed*, yet have we more *occasion* for self-communion than ever. Reflexion will, at that time, be particularly needful, to check the extravagance of our joy ; to preserve us from vanity and self-conceit ; to keep our pampered appetites in subjection ; to guard us from the dangers of prosperity and the temptations of luxury, from dissipation and debauchery, from pride and insolence, from that wanton cruelty and incredible hardness of heart, which high spirits and uninterrupted happiness too often produce. Instead of these wild excesses, religious meditation will turn the overflowings of

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our gladness into their proper channels, into praises and thanksgivings to the gracious Author of our happiness, and a liberal communication to others of the blessings we enjoy; which are the only proper expressions of our thankfulness, and the only suitable return for such distinguishing marks of the divine favour.

If, on the contrary, we are oppressed with a multitude of sorrows, with poverty or disease, with losses and disappointments, the persecution of enemies, or the unkindness of friends, it is to *retirement* we must fly for consolation, not to indulge ourselves in the sullen satisfaction of a secret melancholy, much less to vent the bitterness of our heart in frantic exclamations, and indecent reflexions on the dispensations of Providence; but, after pouring out our souls before God, to go at once to the bottom of the evil, to search for the causes of our affliction where they are too often, alas! to be found, but where we very seldom think of looking for them, in the follies and miscarriages of our own conduct. And if we are so happy as to discover, and so wise as to correct, them, we shall then have fulfilled the end which these sorrows

sorrows were probably designed to answer, and
“ it will be even good for us to have been in
“ trouble.”

How absolutely necessary recollection is to those who are immerfed in vice, is too obvious to be insisted on. If, indeed, they have cast off all thoughts of Religion, and are determined to sin on to the last, they are then in the right of it to avoid this self-communion, and to decline all conversation with a friend that might tell them very disagreeable truths, Their only business is then, not to encourage, but to stifle, reflexion; and after forgetting their Maker, and every thing they ought to remember, to forget themselves too, if they can. But if they are touched with a sense of their danger, and a desire of amendment, their first step is certainly to retire and recollect themselves. This, indeed, in general, is all that is necessary. “ I called mine own ways to remembrance,” says David; and immediately adds, as an almost necessary consequence, and “ turned my
“ feet unto thy testimonies.” “ I made haste,
“ and prolonged not the time to keep thy com-
“ mandments.” This must ever be the result of a serious deliberation. The truths of Religion,
ligion,

ligion, more especially of the Christian Religion, are so clear and convincing; the contrast between vice and virtue, good and evil, so striking; the disproportion between a moment of pleasure and an eternity of pain, so glaring and undeniable; that they want nothing more than consideration to give them their proper weight, insomuch, that to think is to believe and to be saved.

To such as are already entered on the paths of virtue, but are yet at a great distance from Christian perfection, it will be highly useful to stop sometimes, and consider what they have already done, and what they have still to do; sometimes to prevent despair, by looking back on the dangers they have past, and sometimes to excite vigilance, by looking forwards to those before them; to renew, from time to time, their petitions to the Throne of Grace, for that succour and assistance which is so necessary to support them; and, above all, to refresh their hopes and invigorate their resolutions, by frequently looking up to that crown of glory, which will so amply recompence all their labours.

Nor does even the highest degree of perfection that human nature can arrive at, place a
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man above the necessity of calling his ways to remembrance. Nay, perhaps, recollection is then peculiarly necessary, because we are apt to think it least so. "Let him that thinketh he stands, take heed lest he fall." No sooner do we *suppose* ourselves out of the reach of danger, than we cease to be so. It becomes us, therefore, to be jealous of our very virtues, and to let our vigilance and circumspection keep pace with our improvements. Our condition in this life is represented in Scripture as a continual warfare; and we have a very subtle adversary to deal with, who is always upon the watch to take advantage of our security. The good soldier of Christ, therefore, will use the same caution in his spiritual as he would in a temporal warfare; he will observe the same discipline after a victory, as when success was dubious; for no stratagem has been so often practised, and has so often succeeded, as that of surprizing a victorious, and therefore unguarded, enemy.

It must be observed too, that virtue as well as knowledge is progressive, and if we do not gain ground, we lose it. There is always some perfection to be acquired, or some imperfection

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to be amended. If we are not constantly strengthening the barriers opposed to our passions, by successively accumulating one good principle upon another, they will grow weaker every day, and expose us to the hazard of some sudden and violent overthrow. It is astonishing how much the very best men find to do, even when they are regular and punctual in reviewing their conduct; how many errors they have to rectify, how many omissions to supply, how many excesses to retrench, how many growing desires to control. The more frequently they do this, the more they will see the necessity and feel the advantage of it. They will have the pleasure too of observing, how much they increase in goodness and grow in grace, and this will animate them to still higher attainments. They will never think themselves sufficiently advanced in holiness; but “forgetting those things that are behind, and “reaching forth to those things that are before, they will go on from strength to “strength, and press forward towards the “mark, to the prize of the high calling of “God in Christ Jesus*.”

* Phil. iii. 13. Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

Universally, therefore, to every person, in every condition of life, in every stage of his spiritual progress, frequent SELF-COMMUNION is an indispensable duty. If we are accountable beings, and that we are, not only the Sacred Writings declare, but our faculties, our feelings, our consciences, irresistibly prove to us; if we cannot, without the utmost hazard, go on at random, as appetite prompts or accident leads us; if every step we take in our moral conduct must bring us nearer to heaven or to hell; surely it behoves us to call our ways seriously and frequently to remembrance; to consider them with the utmost care and circumspection, and observe where they terminate, and to what point they will carry us. Should we find ourselves in the right way, we shall have the satisfaction of going on in the consciousness of *being* right, and of acting well upon principle. Should we have departed widely from the path of our duty, it will be high time for us to return to it, lest we go too far to retreat, and rush thoughtlessly forward into irretrievable destruction. If we have deviated but slightly, we shall prevent this deviation from growing insensibly wider, and

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regain the ground we have lost with little trouble or pain. In many things we offend all, even the very best of us; and it is far more wise and prudent to find out these offences by reflexion, and to correct them by suitable resolutions, than to let them accumulate by neglect, till some fatal mischief awake us to a sense of our duty, or the stroke of death render it no longer practicable. This single consideration, the possibility of being called, even the healthiest and the youngest of us, suddenly and unexpectedly called, to give an account of ourselves to God, before we have properly settled that account, is of itself enough to make us reflect on our condition, and to do it also without delay. We see almost every day of our lives the most striking and affecting instances of our precarious condition. We see our friends and neighbours suddenly snatched away from us, at a time when we (perhaps they too) least expected it. We see multitudes of others drop around us, one by one, till we are left almost alone in a wide world, deserted by all those whom we most intimately knew and esteemed. Yet all this seems to make little or no impression upon us. We follow our acquaintances to the grave; we drop,

drop, perhaps, a few parting unavailing tears over them, and then return again to the cares, the pleasures, the follies and the vices, of the world, with as much eagerness and alacrity, as if nothing at all had happened that in the least concerned ourselves; as if there was not the least chance or possibility, that the danger, which we see so near us, should at last come home to us. But, surely, these convincing, these alarming proofs of our mortality, ought to have a little more effect on our hearts. When we see thousands fall beside us, and ten thousands at our right hand, we ought to reflect, that *our* turn may, perhaps, be next; that, at the very best, we have no time to lose, and that it highly behoves us to call our ways immediately to remembrance; to make haste, (for death will not wait for us) to make haste, and prolong not the time, to keep God's commandments. When, in short, we consider the extreme uncertainty of life, and the absolute certainty of appearing before our Judge in the very same state in which that life is taken away from us, with all our sins and all our infirmities to answer for, we can never consent to trust our all on so precarious a bottom, nor to let our most important concerns lie at the
mercy

mercy of every accident that may befall us. The loss of a year, the loss of a day, may be the loss of Heaven: "thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." This was said for our admonition: and if, under this apprehension, we can calmly lay ourselves down to sleep, without reviewing our conduct, or preparing ourselves to wake, as we may do, in another world, it is in vain to use any further exhortations. If an argument so plain, so simple, so forcible, has no influence upon our minds, Reason and Religion can do nothing more for us; our obstinacy is incurable, our danger inexpressible.

From that danger, may God of his infinite mercy preserve us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R I A L N O .

many of every age and sex may find in
 The loss of a year, the loss of a day, may be
 the loss of heaven. Then look, and sigh,
 "I shall my soul be reckoned of as mine."
 was this poor creature's state of mind
 this apprehension, we can certainly find
 down to sleep, without knowing our condition
 or preparing ourselves to wake, as we may do
 in another world, it is in vain to be satisfied
 after expirations. It is urgent to begin
 to struggle, to struggle, has no influence upon
 our minds. Reason and Religion can do no
 thing more for us; our obduracy is invincible,
 our danger irreparable. It is for us
 from that danger, may God of his infinite
 mercy preserve us all, through Jesus Christ
 our Lord.

SERMON V.

1 SAM. xiii. 14.

THE LORD HATH SOUGHT HIM A MAN
AFTER HIS OWN HEART, AND THE
LORD HATH COMMANDED HIM TO BE
CAPTAIN OVER HIS PEOPLE.

* **T**HERE is no need to inform you that
the person spoken of in these words
is DAVID king of Israel. The appellation of
THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART, is
a well-known distinction, which having never

* This sermon was originally written and preached before
the university of Cambridge, in the year 1761, in answer to a
profane and licentious pamphlet, which had its day of celebrity
and applause among a certain class of readers; but is now, as it
deserved to be, and as is the usual fate of such productions, en-
tirely forgot. Those parts of the sermon, therefore, which had
a more immediate reference to that publication, are now omitted;
and the whole is rendered less polemical and more practical,
and of course, it is hoped, more generally useful.

been expressly bestowed on any other, has, by long usage, been appropriated solely to him*. The reason of his being so distinguished, is generally presumed to be the excellence of his moral conduct: because a God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, can never be supposed to delight in it; which it is thought must be the case, if the man after his own heart was in any degree an immoral man. On the strength of this supposition, some mistaken friends of Religion, in order to vindicate God's choice, have thought it necessary to prove David's private character perfectly unexceptionable; and some inveterate enemies of Religion, in order to stigmatize that choice, have taken no less pains to make him appear compleatly detestable. But both the one and the other seem to me to have mistaken the case, and misapplied their labour. It was not, I conceive, for the unblemished sanctity of his life, but for reasons of a very different nature, that king David was distinguished by the honourable title assigned to him in the text.

It is, I believe, universally allowed, that the chief design of God in separating the Jewish

* Yet appellations of nearly the same import have been applied to others. See below, p. 102, 3, 4, &c.

nation from the rest of mankind, was to perpetuate the knowledge of himself by means of this peculiar people, and to preserve the worship of the one true God amidst an idolatrous world. This was the grand foundation of the whole Jewish polity; the main purport of their laws; the principle of all God's dealings towards them. Whoever, therefore, exerted himself vigorously and effectually in promoting this great end of the Jewish theocracy, might, with the strictest propriety, be called a man after God's own heart; because he acted in conformity to the main purpose of God's heart: he did the very thing that God wanted to have done; he forwarded the grand design that he had in view. Now this was precisely the character of David, the distinguishing excellence of his life. He was a sincere and hearty lover of his country, a zealous observer of its laws, in opposition to all idolatry, from which he ever kept himself and his people at the utmost distance*. It was not, therefore, on account of his *private virtues*, but his *public conduct*; not for a spotless purity of manners,

* See Le Clerc on Acts xiii. 22; Patrick on 1 Kings xv. 5. 5.

but for his abhorrence of idolatry, and his strict adherence to the civil and religious * laws of his country, that David was honoured with the name of the man after God's own heart †. If any Christian writers have supposed that this title was the mark of *moral perfection*, and in consequence of that have exalted David's character into a standard of virtue, they have, with a very good meaning perhaps, done a very injudicious thing. The explanation here given seems most agreeable to the language of the Scriptures, to the general tenour of David's conduct, to the na-

* One remarkable instance of David's scrupulous observance of the law, in punctually complying with the prohibition given in Deut. xvii. 16, against the use of cavalry in war, see in Bishop SHERLOCK on Prophecy, Disc. 4. p. 370—375. And perhaps his invariable obedience to this important law, “ which was to be a standing trial of prince and people, whether “ they had trust and confidence in God their deliverer,” might contribute not a little towards procuring him this so much envied distinction.

† It is certain, that Abraham was called THE FRIEND OF GOD, (a distinction no less remarkable than king David's) for the reasons here assigned; for his adhering to the belief and worship of the one true God, in opposition to the idolatrous nations amongst whom he lived. See Clarke's sermons, vol. ii. Disc. 38. p. 50. Dublin edition, 1751, and Le Clerc on Gen. vi. 9.

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ture of the Jewish dispensation, and the intentions of its Divine Author.

To what has been urged in favour of this interpretation, by a very eminent writer*, may be added; that though David is in this single passage called a man after God's own heart; yet it is afterwards only said of *Him*, in common with several other Kings, that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord†;" which expression seems intended to convey, and indeed naturally does convey, the same meaning as the other. For it will not be easy to point out a difference betwixt acting "according to any one's heart," and doing that which "is right in his eyes." By determining therefore the signification of this phrase, we shall arrive at the true value of that made use of in the text. Now the expression of "doing that which is right in the eyes of the Lord," is constantly and uniformly applied to those, who were eminent not so much for their virtues in a private, as their zeal in a regal, capacity; for their aversion to idolatry, and scrupulous observance of the law.

* See Divine Legation of Moses, vol. iii. b. 4. f. 6. p. 354. 3d edit.

† 1 Kings xv. 3.

Thus, when it is said of Asa *, that he did that which was "good and right in the eyes of the " Lord;" the reason assigned for it is, "because he took away the altars of the strange " gods, and the high places, and brake down " the images, and cut down the groves; and " commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of " their fathers, and to do the law and the " commandment." Not a word of his moral character, though from his doing that which was not only right but good, one might naturally have expected it. Again, when we are told that Solomon's heart was not *perfect* with the Lord his God; that he went not *fully* after the Lord as did David his father; the proof alledged is, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods †. Whence it evidently appears, that the *perfection* of David's heart consisted principally in his inviolable attachment to the worship of the true God, from which he never deviated or turned aside, "either to the right hand or to " the left."

If this explanation be, as it appears to be, conformable to truth and Scripture, the fol-

2 Chron. xiv. 2, 3, 4.

† 1 Kings xi. 4.

lowing very useful consequences do naturally and immediately flow from it.

I. That, in order to vindicate God's choice of "a man after his own heart," or the truth of the Scriptures in relating it, there is no necessity to prove his moral conduct *faultless*, or to obviate all the accusations which have been brought against him; because this choice having proceeded on other principles, his private conduct is foreign to the question*.

II. That we cannot draw conclusions in favour of any crime, so as to justify it in ourselves, from its having been committed by "a man after God's own heart." Because, though his conformity to the divine will in

* It has been observed, that David's moral character seems to be pronounced faultless, (1 Kings xv. 5.) except in the matter of Uriah. We reply, that the Scripture in this (as in many other places) must necessarily be understood to speak only in *general*; intimating, that king David's conduct was, in the *main*, good and right, and though he might be guilty of other faults, yet none of them were so gross and enormous, so directly repugnant to the *express commands* of God, as this; and therefore not so necessary to be pointed out, and particularly distinguished. Whoever is well acquainted with the Scripture phraseology must allow, that it not only admits, but perpetually requires, such restrictions as this. See Matth. v. 48. and Clarke's Sermons, vol. v. p. 61. and vol. ii. p. 404. Dublin edition, 8vo. 1751.

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some very material instances, did justly entitle him to that appellation ; yet every vicious excess was in *him*, (as it must be in every human creature) the object of God's utter detestation; and very often too of his severest vengeance.

III. That they who have taken so much pains to ridicule and vilify the character of David, with a view of wounding the authority of the Scriptures through his sides, have only shewn their malevolence, without effecting their purpose. Because their whole reasoning being founded on a presumption, that David was selected by God, on account of some peculiar moral excellency ; this foundation being withdrawn, the whole superstructure of cavils and calumnies raised upon it, falls entirely to the ground.

Let it not, however, be inferred from any thing here said, that king David's character ought, by any means, to be viewed in that odious light in which these writers have endeavoured to place it. For although it must be confessed, that his moral conduct is far from being irreproachable ; yet it is no less true, that (excepting those known and acknowledged crimes, which no one pretends to palliate or deny, and which

which he himself deplored with the deepest penitence and contrition) every stain which has with so much malevolent industry been thrown upon his name, may be, to a great degree, if not compleatly, done away. It is not my design to enter here into a particular confutation of all the calumnies and accusations which have been brought against him. It would not be suitable to the nature, or reducible to the usual bounds of a discourse of this kind. But as the heaviest, and, indeed, the only plausible charge, which has been urged, not only against David, but the whole Jewish nation, is that of cruelty; a charge which, without any of those exaggerations it has received, is of itself apt to make the deepest impressions on the honestest minds; for these reasons, I shall suggest a few considerations in regard to this particular; which may serve to put the unwary a little upon their guard, to remove all unnecessary and invidious aggravations, and account, in some measure, for what, perhaps, can neither be wholly justified nor excused.

We who live in these enlightened and polished times, when our manners are softened by the liberal arts, and our souls humanized
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by the benevolent spirit of Christianity, are shocked beyond measure at many things, which, in the ruder ages of antiquity, were not looked upon with so much abhorrence as they deserve. We cannot help bringing those transactions home to ourselves, referring them to our own age and nation, supposing them to be done under the same advantages which we at present enjoy, and consequently as involving the same degree of guilt that we ourselves should incur by the commission of the same crimes. But though this is a very natural, it is by no means an equitable, way of judging. In deciding on the merit or demerit of any men, or society of men, in a remote period, we ought certainly to take into consideration the general character of the times in which they lived, the peculiar modes of thinking, and rules of acting, which then prevailed. If we apply this observation to king David, we shall find, that he lived in an age when the world was sunk in ignorance and barbarity; when men were divided into a number of petty kingdoms, and small communities; when they shut themselves up in "fenced cities," and seldom went out of them but to fight with their neighbours; for every

every neighbour was of course an enemy*. Scarce any other art was then known but the art of war, which consisted in destroying as many as they possibly could, and enslaving the rest. In such a state of things it must necessarily follow, that men familiarized to blood, and trained up to slaughter, would become insensibly steeled against the impressions of humanity, and contract a habit of cruelty, which would give a tinge to the whole current of their lives, impart even to the face of peace itself too sanguine a complexion, and discolour the whole intercourse of civil, social, and domestic offices. We are not then to wonder, that the Jews themselves were infected with this epidemical ferocity of manners. We are not to charge them with more than their share of the common guilt, we are not to represent them as a people *distinguished* by their cruelty, but as constituting a consistent part of a barbarous world.

It may be thought, perhaps, that though this way of reasoning is to be admitted in general, yet it has not the same force in regard

* The state of our own kingdom under the Saxon heptarchy, may, perhaps, give us some faint idea of the barbarity of all kingdoms in the early ages of the world.

to the Jews as when applied to any other nation; because they being God's chosen and peculiar people, ought to be found superior in benevolence, as well as every other virtue, to the rest of mankind. But it must ever be remembered, (what God himself frequently declares*,) that it was not for their "own sakes," for their "own righteousness," that they were chosen, but (as in the particular case of king David above stated) for other reasons; for preserving the knowledge, and promoting the worship, of the one true God; for manifesting his divine power in working miracles, and for executing his judgments on those impenitent nations, whose enormous wickedness was then ripe for vengeance. The moral goodness therefore of the Jews being no peculiar object of God's choice, we are not on that account merely to expect from them any uncommon degrees of virtue, or any exemption from the reigning vices of their age.

Nay, so little reason have we to expect any extraordinary instances of humanity from the peculiarity of their circumstances, that this very peculiarity might, without great care and circumspection, have been apt to give an un-

* Deut. ix. 4. 5.

favourable turn to their disposition. The distinction bestowed upon them, though not in reality for their own merit, yet in preference to the rest of the world, was not unlikely to inspire them with too high an opinion of themselves, and too contemptible a one of others. Their exclusion from a free and general intercourse with the surrounding nations, (though absolutely necessary for the most important purposes) might, however, tend to contract their notions and confine their benevolence. That extreme abhorrence in which they very justly held the vices of their neighbours, might sometimes exceed the bounds of virtuous indignation: and that unhappy, though necessary, task imposed upon them, of destroying the sinful nations of Canaan, might too easily lead them to transgress the laws of humanity on less justifiable occasions. If, under these circumstances, the Jews were not more inhuman than their neighbours, they certainly deserve some praise; if they were, there are, you see, many mitigating pleas in their favour; and the blame will not rest, either on the temper of the people, or the temper of their religion.

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It has, I know, been frequently asserted, that the cruelty of the Jews exceeded that of any other people, not only of their own times, but in any age of the world. This, however, has been much more confidently advanced than clearly proved. From what little we can learn of the nations cotemporary with the Jews, in the early periods of their history, there is not the least reason to imagine, that they were of a more merciful disposition; and if we hear less of their cruelty, it is because we know less of their history*. What renders this extremely probable is, that in much later ages, when the minds of men were greatly softened and subdued by the improvements of civil life, we meet with much less real, though more ostentatious, humanity than amongst the Jews; and I believe there are very few here, whose recollection will not readily supply them with repeated instances of cruelty, in the most flourishing periods of the most civilized Heathens, which far surpass any that can be pro-

* From the horrid custom which we know prevailed amongst the Canaanites of sacrificing their children to their idols, we may rationally presume, that the Jews were much outdone in acts of barbarity by their neighbours,

duced from the most sanguinary transactions of the Jewish people*.

Whatever were the inhumanities of the Israelites, they had not, however, that aggravation, with which those of the Pagans were frequently attended, that of being exercised on their own countrymen, their most faithful dependents, their nearest relations, and dearest friends. The proofs of their cruelty are principally, if not wholly, taken from their treatment of the idolatrous nations around them. But when we reflect, that the laws of nature, and the rights of nations, were not then so

* Several acts of cruelty which have been ascribed to King David and the Jewish people, appear, on a more accurate examination, to have been grounded on an incorrect translation of particular passages of the Old Testament. Thus it is said, 2 Sam. xii. 31. that when Rabbah (the capital city of the Ammonites) was taken, "David brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kilns." Hence it is inferred, that he put them to death with the most exquisite and unheard-of torments. But it has been shown by several learned critics, that our version of this place would have been more accurate, and more strictly conformable to the original, if it had rendered the passage thus: He put them *to* saws and *to* harrows of iron, and *to* axes of iron, and made them pass *by* or *to* the brick-kilns: that is, he put them to hard labour, with the tools and in the places here specified. See Mr. Ormerod's Remarks on Dr. Priestley's Disquisitions, &c. 2d ed. p. 72.

clearly ascertained as they have since been; that wars were then waged on savage, unrelenting, exterminating principles; and that those nations which felt the weight of their heaviest vengeance, were not only their avowed and inveterate enemies, but so incorrigibly and abominably flagitious* as to call aloud for punishment, of which the Jews were only instruments in the hand of the Almighty; it will be easily seen, that such proofs are by no means pertinent and satisfactory. The truth is, these transient and casual instances of cruelty, though they are such as at first sight must necessarily strike and offend us most, yet are not so proper to determine a national character, and denominate a people constitutionally barbarous, as those *established* and *permanent* maxims of internal and domestic cruelty, which never existed in the Jewish government, but were universally received and practised, were encouraged by the laws, and applauded by the historians, of those very nations, who esteemed and called all others in respect of themselves barbarians. It is these, which, though less insisted on by writers, and less attended to by

* See a detail of their execrable vices, Lev. xviii.

readers,

readers, are yet more repugnant to humanity, more destructive to the species, and more characteristic and decisive evidences of a malevolent spirit, than those accidental outrages and excesses, on which historians generally lavish all the horrors of description *.

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* There is scarce any author, antient or modern, who has inveighed with such indiscriminate and unmeasured rancour against the whole Jewish nation, as Mr. Voltaire. There are few of his latter prose publications in which he has not introduced this unfortunate people, for the purpose of loading them with reproach or ridicule. But his zeal sometimes outruns his prudence and his regard to truth, and instead of exciting the indignation of mankind against them, turns it upon himself. Among numberless instances in this sort, I shall only single out one. In his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, *Art. Anthropophages*, he informs us, that from the time of Ezekiel the Jews must have been in the habit of eating human flesh; because that prophet assures them, that if they will defend themselves courageously against the King of Persia, they shall not only eat the *horses* of their enemies, but the *horsemen and the warriors themselves*. How will the reader be astonished, (if he is not a little acquainted with the character and manner of Mr. Voltaire) when, on looking into Ezekiel, he finds, that the whole of this is a compleat fabrication; and that it is not *the Jews*, but the *ravenous birds* and *the beasts of the field*, who, in the bold and figurative language of Prophecy, are called upon "to eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth," Ezek. xxxix. 4, 17, 18, &c.

It is a great pity that this lively writer did not, for his own credit, pay a little more regard to the sage advice of a friend, who knew him and his practices well, the late King of Prussia.

I am aware, indeed, that the extirpation of the Canaanites was enjoined by the Mosaical laws, and that the Jews were forbid by no less than Divine authority to shew them any mercy or compassion. This is true; and at the same time very consistent with a dispensation in the main benevolent. For when we consider God in the light he should always, with respect to those times, be considered in, not only as the common Governor of all mankind, but as the more immediate Ruler and Legislator of the Jewish nation; and as enforcing obedience to his authority, amongst the Jews in particular, amongst all nations in some measure, by temporal punishments and rewards;

That prince, in one of his letters to him, alluding to a certain well-known transaction of Voltaire's with a Jewish merchant, which his majesty calls *a vile business*, (and which, perhaps, might be one reason of this author's implacable enmity to the whole nation) says to him, "I hope you will have no more quarrels either with the Old Testament or the New. Such contests are dishonourable: and though possessed of more genius than any man in France, you cannot avoid finally injuring your reputation by the disgrace of such conduct." *Posthumous Works of Fred. II.* vol. vii. lett. 245. p. 402.

The Jews, however, have met with a very able and eloquent defender in the author of *Lettres de quelques Juifs, Portugais, & Allemands, a M. de Voltaire.* Paris, 1769.—See also Div. Leg. vol. iv. b. 5. f. 1. p. 139.

it was no more a violation of mercy in him to enact, or in them to execute, such a penal law against the Canaanites, than it would be in a Prince to punish his rebellious subjects by the hands of his faithful ones, or in them to inflict that punishment. Such examples of severity are necessary to the very being of a state, and serve at once to repress the insolence of the wicked, and to secure the obedience of the good *.

If this exception be, as it certainly ought to be, admitted; and if we make such other equitable allowances, as the state of Religion and the state of Society, at that time, do necessarily require; the Mosaical law will, I am persuaded, appear infinitely superior, in point of humanity, to all the institutions of the most

* The absolute necessity of extirpating the Canaanites, or at least destroying their national polity; the peculiar propriety of doing this by the sword of the Jews; the great and benevolent purposes that were answered by their separation from the world; the advantages that *all other nations* derived from it; and many other particulars of the divine œconomy with regard to this extraordinary people; see clearly and ably explained in *Bishop Law's Considerations on the Theory of Religion*, from p. 82, to p. 98. 3d edit.

Vide Butler's *Analogy*, part ii. ch. 3. p. 267. 4th edition, 1750.

celebrated lawgivers of antiquity. It abounds with injunctions of mercy and pity, not only to Jews, but to strangers, to enemies, and even to those who had most cruelly and injuriously oppressed them. "If thy brother be waxen
"poor and fallen in decay with thee; then
"thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be
"a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live
"with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or
"increase; but fear thy God, that thy brother
"may live with thee. Thou shalt not
"oppress a stranger. Thou shalt love him
"as thyself. Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite: thou shalt not abhor an Ægyptian.
"If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to
"him." The dispositions in favour of the poor are truly singular and amiable. "Thou
"shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand
"from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open
"thy hand wide unto him; and shalt surely
"lend him sufficient for his need. When ye
"reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not
"wholly reap the corners of thy field; neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy
"harvest; and if thou have forgot a sheaf in
"the field, thou shalt not go back to fetch it: neither shalt thou bind up the sheaf so tight, that the gleaner cannot pass by it: but thou shalt leave it, that the poor and the stranger may glean it: and thou shalt remember, that thou art a man." "the

“ the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it ;
 “ and when thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou
 “ shalt not go over the boughs again ; when
 “ thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard,
 “ thou shalt not glean it afterwards ; it shall
 “ be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the
 “ widow *.” The provisions made for the
 security and comfort of that most useful,
 though too often most wretched, part of the
 species, slaves and servants, are entirely worthy
 of a law that came down from Heaven. That
 absolute and unlimited power over the lives of
 slaves indulged to their tyrannical masters by
 almost all Heathen lawgivers, a power most
 scandalously abused to the disgrace of all hu-
 manity, was effectually restrained by the Jew-
 ish law, which punished the murder of a slave
 with the utmost rigour †. The kindness en-
 joined towards hired servants is most remark-
 able. “ Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant
 “ that is poor and needy ; whether he be of
 “ thy brethren or of thy strangers that are in
 “ the land within thy gates. At his day thou

* Lev. xxv. 35, 36. Ex. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 34. Deut.
 xxiii. 7. Ex. xxiii. 4. Deut. xv. 7, 8. Lev. xix. 9, 10.
 Deut. xxiv. 19.

† Ex. xxi. 20.

" shalt give him his hire ; neither shall the
 " sun go down upon it ; for he is poor and
 " setteth his heart upon it *. Thou shalt not
 " rule over thy brother with rigour §." The
 injunctions respecting Hebrew slaves were no
 less merciful. " If thy brother, a Hebrew
 " man, or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto
 " thee, and serve thee six years, in the seventh
 " year thou shalt let him go free from thee ;
 " and thou shalt not let him go away empty ;
 " but thou shalt furnish him liberally out of
 " thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of
 " thy wine-press : and of that wherewith the
 " Lord thy God hath blessed thee, thou shalt
 " give unto him †." It should seem also, as if
 all other bondmen or slaves (even those that
 were captured in war or brought from the
 neighbouring Heathen nations) were to be
 emancipated in the year of the Jubilee ; that
 is, every fiftieth year : for it is said *universally*,
 " Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and pro-

* Deut. xxiv. 14, 15.

§ Lev. xxv. 43.

† Deut. xv. 12, 13. Other instances of this humanity in the Jewish law, may be seen in Deut. xxii. 6, 8. xxiv. 5, 6, 12, 13, to the end. Rousseau himself (*Emile*, lib. 5. p. 6.) commends the benevolent spirit of the law mentioned Ex. xxii. 26, 27. See also on this point the antient part of the *Universal History*, vol. iii. 8vo. p. 136, note b. and p. 152.

" claim

“claim *liberty* throughout *all* the land, to *all* “the inhabitants thereof*.” The utmost care, in short, is taken throughout to guard against every species of tyranny and oppression, and to protect the helpless and weak from the wanton insolence of prosperity and power. The tenderness of the divine legislature thought no creature below its notice; and extended itself to the minutest articles of social and domestic life, which, though unnoticed by less benevolent lawgivers, do, in fact, constitute a very great and essential part of human happiness and misery.

With such heavenly institutions as these (which we shall in vain look for in any Pagan government) is every page of the Jewish law replete. It is from these we are to form our judgment of the Jews, of their Religion, and its Divine Author†; and if these had their proper

* Lev. xxv. 10.

† A consideration of the general temper and disposition of law will be found of great advantage to civil life; and will supply us with very useful theory. It is reaching the heart in the first instance, and making ourselves masters of the genius of a whole people at once, by reading them in that glass which represents them best, the turn of their civil institutions. There is scarce a passage in all antiquity more happily imagined, than that where Demosthenes tells us, that the laws of a country

proper effect on the manners of the people, they must have produced upon the whole a constant and habitual (though, perhaps, from the very nature of their situation, a confined) benevolence, much superior, not only to that of their rude cotemporaries, but to the boasted lenity of much later and more polished nations.

It will be readily understood, that every thing which has been here said to vindicate the Jewish nation in general from the charge of *distinguished cruelty*, is applicable to King David in particular. But he may also lay claim to some peculiar indulgence from the singularity of his own circumstances, which were frequently very unfavourable to humanity. It was his fortune to pass through almost every scene of life, and to meet with almost every incident in his way, that could be injurious to his temper, or give an edge to his resentments. Extremes of happiness or misery, sudden transitions from the one to the other, the persecutions of enemies, and the unkind-

were considered as the morals of a state, and the character of a whole people taken collectively. *Dr. Taylor's Elements of Civil Law*, 2d edit. p. 160.

ness

ness of friends, are circumstances which seldom fail of hurting the mind, and vitiating the most benevolent disposition. All these did David experience in quick succession, and in their fullest extent.

He was originally nothing more than a shepherd; and at a time when his youth and inexperience seemed to disqualify him for any more important business than that of feeding a flock, he broke out at once the champion and preserver of his country. Transplanted on a sudden from a cottage to a court, he experienced alternately the smiles and the frowns of a capricious monarch; was sometimes flattered with the hope of being united to him by the closest bonds of affinity, and sometimes in danger of being struck by him with a javelin to the wall. Driven at length from his presence; and torn from the arms of those he loved, "his soul was hunted from city to city;" and after suffering the last distresses of human nature, he was not only restored to the honours he had lost, but seated on the throne of Israel. And here, though surrounded with all the pleasures and magnificence of an Eastern monarch; yet was he at the same time

not

not only harassed with the common uneasinesses of life, and the cares inseparable from royalty, but experienced a succession of the bitterest sufferings and the heaviest domestic calamities; was once more driven from Jerusalem, deserted by his friends, cursed by his enemies, and persecuted by his darling son; whose death did indeed put a period to his public calamities, but plunged him in the deepest affliction, and was very near bringing down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

When to these private considerations we add those more general ones above-mentioned, we can hardly be surprized at any excesses of severity that King David occasionally gave way to. We shall rather be surprized to find, in so tumultuous and military a kind of life, many striking instances of humanity, many amiable tenderneesses, many uncommon and heroical exertions of generosity, which plainly indicated a temper constitutionally good and right, but labouring under the weight of numberless disadvantages, which sometimes dragged it from its true bias, and forced it to take a turn directly opposite to its natural bent. His circumstances exposed him to a variety of injuries

ries and insults; the liveliness of his sensations made him feel them, the impetuosity of his passions made him resent them, too strongly. And yet, though every thing thus concurred to stimulate his revenge, though the guilt of indulging it was not then so apparent and so acknowledged as it now is; yet did he, on one memorable occasion, resist the strongest impulses of this importunate and ungovernable passion, though tempted to gratify it by the most inviting opportunity on his inveterate enemy, whose past conduct would almost have justified any extremity; and whose removal would not only have put an immediate end to his distresses, but, in all appearance, opened his way to the attainment of his utmost wishes, and raised him at once from an exile to a king*.

It is but justice also to add, that this prince had a sensibility of soul, which, though it gave too keen an edge both to his relish of pleasure and his resentment of injury, yet gave at the same time an uncommon fervour to his repentance, a peculiar vigour and vivacity to all his virtues; rendered him most feelingly alive to the noblest and the tenderest sentiments;

* 1 Sam. xxiv. Vide Peters on Job, p. 352.

and inspired him with every liberal and social affection that can warm the human breast. "O Absalom, my son, my son," are words that will go to every parent's heart that has experienced the same misfortune, and speak to it with a force and eloquence that has never yet been equalled. He had, moreover, as his inimitable writings abundantly testify, a most ardent spirit of devotion, and a boundless zeal for the honour of God and the interests of his Religion; and the general tenour of his conduct, when left to its own natural course, very clearly evinced, that he was, upon the whole, a conscious observer and a strenuous asserter of the Divine laws, a most disinterested and active patriot, the tenderest of parents, and the most affectionate of friends.

At the same time, however, that we do justice to the virtues of King David, we must acknowledge and lament his faults, which were undoubtedly great, and in one flagrant instance more especially, justly subject him to the severest reproach. But while we censure him on this account, as he deserves, it will be our wisdom to look well also to ourselves. To the Infidel it is matter of unspeakable triumph, that

that the man after God's own heart should have been betrayed into such dreadful crimes. But to the Christian it must be a subject of most serious concern and alarm, to observe so striking a proof of the frailty and weakness of human nature, even when strengthened by mature years, and confirmed by early habits of virtue and religion. It holds out to him a most awful lesson, how indispensably necessary it is, even for men of the best dispositions and most exalted piety, to keep their hearts with all diligence; to watch and to guard those passions, which they feel most predominant in their souls, with unremitting vigilance, to the latest period of their lives; and to apply most fervently and frequently for that help from above, which is promised in the Gospel to every sincere believer, and without which our utmost efforts and our firmest resolutions will, in some unguarded and unsuspected moment, give way to the impetuosity of passion, and we shall be unexpectedly plunged into an abyss of guilt and misery.

But, above all things, let us beware of *perverting* the example of David to our own ruin, and of considering his deviations from
 X duty,

duty, not as they truly are, a warning to us against danger, but as an encouragement to us to tread in the same unhallowed paths of vice. Let us not flatter ourselves, that because HE, so devout, so religious, so distinguished by the favour of Heaven, was once most fatally seduced into sin, that we may therefore commit the same or similar crimes with impunity. On the contrary, if these crimes appear so odious and detestable, even in a Jewish monarch, who had to plead in his excuse (though all excuse was vain) the temptations of a court, the manners of the times, the peculiarity of his own circumstances, and the liberties too often taken by men in his situation; they must assume a much more frightful aspect in a private Christian, who has none of those mitigating pleas to offer, who lives in much more enlightened and civilized times, has much stricter rules of moral conduct presented to him in the Gospel, is called to a much higher degree of purity and holiness, has far more powerful aid from Heaven to support him in his duty, more terrible punishments to work upon his fears, and more glorious rewards to animate his hopes.

Let

Let it be remembered too, that the offences of David were by no means passed over with impunity; that he was severely punished for them by the remorse of his own conscience, by the deep affliction into which they plunged him, by the wretched consequences they drew after them, and by the heavy and positive penalties denounced and inflicted upon him by God himself.

Hear how the repenting monarch bemoans himself in the anguish of his soul, and then say whether his situation was an enviable one; whether you would *chuse* to imitate his misconduct, and take the consequences.

“ Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy
 “ great goodness, according to the multitude of
 “ thy mercies do away mine offences. Wash
 “ me thoroughly from my wickedness, and
 “ cleanse me from my sin; for I acknowledge
 “ my fault, and my sin is ever before me.
 “ Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew
 “ a right spirit within me. Cast me not away
 “ from thy presence, and take not thy Holy
 “ Spirit from me. Thy rebuke hath broken
 “ my heart, I am full of heaviness; I looked
 “ for some to have pity on me, but there was

“ no man, neither found I any to comfort me,
“ My God, my God, look upon me ; why hast
“ thou forsaken me, and art so far from my
“ health and the words of my complaint. I
“ cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not ;
“ and in the night-season also I take no rest,
“ Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon
“ me, for I am desolate and in misery. The
“ sorrows of my heart are enlarged, O bring
“ thou me out of my troubles. Look upon
“ my adversity and misery, and forgive me all
“ my sin. Thine arrows stick fast in me, and
“ thy hand presseth me sore : for my wicked-
“ nesses are gone over my head, and are like a
“ sore burthen, too heavy for me to bear. I
“ am brought into so great trouble and misery,
“ that I go mourning all the day long. My
“ heart panteth, my strength faileth, and the
“ sight of mine eyes is gone from me *.”

It is hardly in the power of language to express greater agony of mind than this ; and no one, surely, that reads these passages, can wish to undergo the misery there described. It is impossible for him, if he is of a sound mind, to make so wretched a bargain for himself, as

* Pf. li, lxix. xxv. xxxviii, &c. &c.

to plunge voluntarily into the crimes of the royal penitent, that he may afterwards taste the bitter fruits of his contrition and remorse ; or, (what is still worse, and what no sinner can be secure against) that he may die without repenting at all, and rush into the unceasing torments of “ a worm that never dies, and a “ fire that is never quenched.”

SERMON VI.

JAMES i. 27.

PURE RELIGION, AND UNDEFILED BEFORE
GOD AND THE FATHER, IS THIS, TO VI-
SIT THE FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS IN
THEIR AFFLICTION, AND TO KEEP HIM-
SELF UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD.

IT should seem as if Religion was here made to consist only of two parts; CHARITY or BENEVOLENCE respecting others, and PURITY or SELF-GOVERNMENT respecting ourselves. The first of these, Benevolence, is characterized to us by singling out one of the strongest of our social affections, compassion towards the distressed, which, in the beautiful language of Scripture, is called *visiting*, that is, relieving "the fatherless and widows in their affliction;" a mode of expression very com-

mon to the sacred writers; especially when they are describing the virtue of Charity, which is almost constantly represented by one or other of its most striking features.

The other part of Religion, here specified Self-Government, is very distinctly marked out by the phrase of "keeping himself unspotted from the world;" which plainly means a total abstinence from the immoral practices and unlawful pleasures of the world; a strict command over our irregular appetites and passions; an abhorrence of every thing that tends to debase our nature, and contaminate our souls.

But it must immediately occur to every one, that, besides the two branches of Religion here enumerated, there is a third, of which St. James takes no notice. And it may appear, at first sight, a little extraordinary, that an Apostle of Christ, when he seems to be giving a formal definition of his Master's Religion, should omit what has ever been esteemed a most essential part of it, *Piety, or the love of God*. But, although this duty is not expressly mentioned, yet it is evidently implied, in the text, which recommends such Religion only as terminates ultimately in God, such as is
pure

pure and undefiled "before God and the Father." And the reason why St. James did not more particularly insist on this point was, because he had no occasion to press it on the persons to whom he was writing. That acts of piety were necessary, they readily owned; but they were too apt, it seems, to think, that scarce any thing else was necessary; and that, provided they were punctual and exact in their devotional exercises, they might be allowed to relax a little in the government of their passions, and the duties owing to their neighbour. St. James, therefore, pointing the whole force of his admonition against this dangerous error, and passing over those religious observances, on which they were already disposed to pique themselves too much, reminds them in the text, that although God was indeed to be worshipped, yet it was to be not only with their lips, but in their lives; that Religion, that even Devotion itself, did not consist merely in calling upon God's name, but in obeying his laws; in acts of kindness to their fellow-creatures, and an unspotted sanctity of manners.

Let no one, therefore, infer, what some have been too willing to infer, from the passage before us, that an inoffensive, beneficent, and tolerably good moral life, is the *whole* of Religion ; and that the love of God constitutes no part of our duty. It is, on the contrary, our principal and most important duty, or, as the Scriptures express it, *the first and great commandment*. And as, without Piety, there can be no Religion, so without Belief in the Son of God, there can be evidently no Christianity. Unless our virtue is built on this foundation, unless it be grounded on true evangelical principles, it may be very good Pagan morality, but it is not Christian godliness. And whatever other rewards it may be entitled to, it can have no claim to that eternal one, which is not a matter of right, strictly due to our services, but the free gift of God to those only that embrace the offers of salvation made to them in the Gospel, on the conditions of a right faith, as well as of a right conduct. Yet it has become of late but too common, not only to treat the peculiar doctrines of Christianity with contempt, and to set up practical morality as the sum and substance

stance of all religion; but what is still more extraordinary, men have frequently thought, or pretended to think, that even morality itself was not necessary in all its extent; and that of the two duties mentioned in the text, CHARITY and SELF-GOVERNMENT, it was fully sufficient to cultivate that which best suited their own constitutions or inclinations. Accordingly, they have very seldom paid a due regard to both these at the same time; but slighting each of them in their turn, have persuaded themselves, that the observance of the one would atone for the neglect or violation of the other.

These assertions might very easily be proved by facts; and it would be no unpleasing, nor perhaps unprofitable speculation, to trace the various revolutions that have happened in the opinion and the practice of mankind with regard to these two Christian virtues. But it is sufficient for my present purpose to observe, that as the distinguishing character of our forefathers in the last age was preciseness and severity of manners; we, their descendants, on the contrary, have taken up Benevolence for *our* favourite virtue: and that the same vigour of mind,

mind, and national vehemence of temper, which carried them such remarkable lengths in the rugged paths of moral discipline, has with us taken a different direction, and a gayer look; is stirring up all the humane and tender affections within our souls, and urging us on to the noblest exertions of generosity and beneficence.

For to our praise it must be owned, that it will not be easy to find any age or nation in which both private and public benevolence was ever carried to so high a pitch, or distributed in so many different channels, as it is amongst ourselves at this day. Numerous as the evils are to which man is naturally subject, and industrious as he is in creating others by his own follies and indiscretions, modern charity is still equal and present to them all, and accommodates itself to the many various shapes in which human misery appears. It feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, protects the widow, relieves the stranger, educates the orphan, instructs the ignorant, reclaims the sinner, receives the penitent. So far, then, you have done well; you have discharged, perhaps, one

branch of your duty, but how have you performed the others? What regard, more especially, have you paid to that virtue which is linked with charity in the very words of the text? Whilst you "visit the fatherless and "widows in their affliction, do you keep "yourselves unspotted from the world?" Are you plain and simple in your diet and your attire? Are you sober, chaste, and modest? Are you temperate in your pleasures, and discreet in your amusements? Do you mingle solitude and reflexion with business and with society? Do you bridle your tongues, and moderate your desires? Do you keep your bodies under and bring them into subjection? Do you crucify the flesh with all its affections and lusts? Do you carefully avoid every thing that may inflame and stimulate your passions? Are you, in short, as rigorous to yourselves as you are benevolent to others? If to these questions your consciences can answer, with truth, in the affirmative; and if to all this you have added the sincerest sentiments of love and gratitude to your Maker, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier, then, indeed, you have been good and faithful servants to your heavenly Master; then may you safely call yourselves disciples of
Christ;

Christ; and, with humble reliance on his merits, not your own, may expect to enter into the joy of your Lord.

But if, on the contrary, there are but too evident marks among certain classes of men of an inextinguishable thirst for pleasure and amusement, and those too not always of the most innocent and reputable nature; if luxury not only prevails as a fashion, but is studied as a science; if charity is in some persons nothing more than a cloak for voluptuousness; if benevolence is industriously and officiously, I had almost said invidiously, cried up, and magnified as the *only* duty of a man, nay, even of a Christian; whilst purity is ridiculed and set at nought, as a sour, unsocial, unhumanized virtue; is called austerity, preciseness, puritanism, or any thing but what it really is; if the natural consequences of this licentious doctrine are but too visible in that rapid growth of dissoluteness amongst us, which seems to threaten the extinction of every moral and religious principle; if, in fine, the grossest violations of decency, nay, even of connubial fidelity, are often treated with levity and gaiety, as subjects rather of pleasantry than of reproach; and are not only committed without scruple,
but

but avowed, and sometimes defended too, without a blush; if this be a faithful portrait of our manners, what infinite cause have we, amidst all our boasted charities, to tremble at the danger of our situation! It is incredible, it is impossible, that the righteous Governor of the Universe can be an unconcerned spectator of such wickedness as this!

But is our BENEVOLENCE then, you will say, of no avail? Will not that shelter us from punishment? For charity, we are told, "shall cover the multitude of sins*:" and, accordingly, we take effectual care that it shall have a multitude to cover. But whose sins does St. Peter say that charity shall cover? Our own, or those of others? He may only mean, that a charitable man will not wantonly *divulge*, but will *cover*, will throw a veil over, the failings of his neighbour. But supposing, what is most probable, that our own sins are meant, what sort of sins do you think that charity shall cover? Not, surely, those gross, presumptuous habitual ones, which we would gladly shelter under it; but those casual slips and inadvertencies, those almost unavoidable errors, weaknesses, and imperfections, to which

* 1 Pet. iv. 8.

the very best of men are subject, and which are almost the only sins that a truly charitable man can have to cover. For what is this charity, at last, of which such great things are said in Scripture? Read over that well-known, and most eloquent description of it by St. Paul, and you will find it to be something very different from that false image of it which the philosophy of this world has set up to worship. From thence, from the whole tenour of Scripture, you will find it to be not merely an easy, undistinguishing good nature, or a thoughtless, profuse, pernicious liberality; but an inward principle of universal kind affection, founded in nature, improved by reason, and perfected by grace; restraining us, in the first place, from doing harm; then prompting us, on every occasion, and towards every person, to do all the good we possibly can. This is the only charity that the Gospel is acquainted with; the only one, that in conjunction with repentance, and faith in our Redeemer, can in the least contribute to obtain pardon for our failings, and render us meet to be partakers of the kingdom of Heaven,

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In whatever sense, then, we understand the expression of *charity covering our sins*, the sensualist can never avail himself of that protection, because he acts in direct contradiction to the very first principles of true Christian charity. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour," says St. Paul; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law; and therefore he who works such ill to his neighbour, as the voluptuary does every day, by destroying the innocence, the peace, the comfort, the happiness, temporal and eternal, of those very persons for whom he professes the tenderest regard) must be an utter stranger to *real* philanthropy. Though he may feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; yet, if to gratify his own passions, he plunges those who have never offended him in misery and disgrace, he is a hurtful member of society. Nay, perhaps his very liberality and good-nature serve only to render him the *more* hurtful. They throw a lustre over the criminal part of his character, and render him an object of admiration to the croud of servile imitators, who not having the sense to separate his vices from his accomplishments,

plishments, form their conduct upon his example in the gross, and hope to become equally agreeable by being equally wicked. And, as if it was not enough to have these patterns before our eyes in real life, they are once more served up to us in the productions of some modern writers, who, to the fond ambition of what they call copying after nature, and of gaining a name, are content to sacrifice the interests of virtue, and to lend a willing hand towards finishing the corruption of our manners. Hence it is, that in several of our most favourite works of fancy and amusement, the principal figure of the piece is some professed libertine, who, on the strength of a pleasing figure, a captivating address, and a certain amiable generosity of disposition, has the privilege of committing whatever irregularities he thinks fit, and of excusing them in the easiest manner imaginable, as the unavoidable effects of constitution, and the little foibles of a heart intrinsically good. Thus, whilst he delights our imagination, and wins our affections, he never fails, at the same time, to corrupt our principles. And young people, more especially, instead of being inspired with a just detestation

tion of vice, are furnished with apologies for it which they never forget, and are even taught to consider it as a necessary part of an accomplished character.

It becomes, then, every sincere Christian to oppose to the utmost this prevailing licentiousness, which insinuates itself into the manners and minds of men, under the protection of some engaging qualities, with which it sometimes is, but much oftener *affects* to be, united. And the only way of putting a stop to this mischief, and of restoring that union which the text enforces, and which ought always to subsist between the two great branches of practical morality, is to show by our example (the most intelligible and convincing of all proofs) that BENEVOLENCE is then most lovely, when joined with its true ally, its proper companion, SELF-GOVERNMENT; that, in order to form a pleasing character, it is by no means necessary to throw into it any impure alloy; but that, on the contrary, a truly pious, and strictly moral Christian, will not only be the most virtuous, but the most amiable of men.

Unhappily, indeed, a contrary opinion has too long and too generally prevailed amongst us :

and licentious wits have taught great numbers to believe that purity of manners is a vulgar and a contemptible virtue, and that all pretence to it is in general nothing more than hypocrisy and grimace. But let us not be frightened by a few hard words, and a little witless buffoonery, from pursuing steadily the invariable rule of moral rectitude. As sure as God himself is all purity and perfection, there is such a thing as real purity of heart and life; and it is one of the most exalted virtues that can dignify human nature. It gives that strength and vigour, and masculine firmness to the mind, which is the foundation of every thing great and excellent. It has produced some of the noblest struggles, and most heroic exertions of soul, that the world ever saw, and is, perhaps, a more convincing, more unequivocal proof of our sincerity in Religion, than even benevolence itself. When it is considered how many inducements, how many *temptations*, there are to acts of humanity, to which nature prompts, to which fashion draws, to which vanity, interest, popularity, ambition, sometimes lead us, one cannot *always* be sure that they proceed from a truly Christian principle.

ciple. But he who combats his darling passions, and gives up the fondest wishes of his soul; who keeps a constant guard upon all his thoughts, words, and actions; intrepidly withstands the most alluring temptations, and takes up his cross to follow Christ; this man cannot well be influenced by any thing but a strong sense of duty, and an undissembled conviction that he is bound to obey even the severest precepts of the Gospel. *His* good actions are neither seen nor applauded of men. They are performed in secrecy and in silence without ostentation, without reward, save only the approbation of that all-seeing God, who is witness to the bitter conflicts of his soul, and will one day make him ample amends in the sight of angels and of men.

Let it not, however, be supposed that any thing here said is meant to depreciate that most heavenly virtue, charity, or to rob those that exercise it of that fair fame, that heartfelt satisfaction, and those glorious rewards hereafter, which cannot fail to recompense their generous labours. May every branch and species of benevolence for ever flourish and abound. May its

divine and blessed influence spread continually wider and wider, till it takes in every creature under heaven, and leaves not one misery unalleviated, one grievance unredressed. But all excellent as it is, let not this, let not any single virtue, engross our whole attention. Let us not confine ourselves to the easy, the delightful, the reputable works of beneficence, and neglect the other great branch of moral duty, SELF-DENIAL; no less necessary and important, but much more difficult, and which, therefore, stands in need of every possible argument in its favour to recommend and support it. Let us no longer make invidious and unjust distinctions between these two kindred virtues. In nature, in reason, in the sight of God, in the Gospel of Christ, self-government is of equal value with social duties. They equally tend to the perfection of our own minds, and the comfort of our fellow-creatures. The same rewards are in Scripture promised to both; the same penalties are denounced against the violation of both; and there is so strict and intimate a union between them, that the cultivation or neglect of the one, must necessarily lead, and has, in fact, always ultimately led, to the improvement
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or depravation of the other. What then God and nature, as well as Christ and his apostles, have joined together, let no man dare to put asunder. Let not any one flatter himself with the hope of obtaining the rewards, or even escaping the punishments of the Gospel, by performing only *one* branch of his duty. Let him not imagine, that the most rigorous severity of manners can excuse him from the exercise of undiffembled love to God and to mankind ; nor, on the other hand, let him suppose, that under the shelter either of devotion or of benevolence, he may securely indulge his favourite passions ; may compound, as it were, with God for his sensuality by acts of generosity, and purchase by his wealth a general licence to sin. Let him not, in short, content himself with being only half a Christian. Let him visit, as often as he pleases, the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. Let his piety be fervent, and his faith sincere. But let him, at the same time, take care, as he values his salvation, that he keep himself unspotted from the world,

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and nature, as well as Christ and his apostles,
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asunder. Let not any one flatter himself with
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attaining the punishments of the Gospel, by
conforming only one branch of his duty. Let
him not imagine, that this single rigorous exer-
cise of men can excuse him from the exer-
cise of another, which love to God and to man-
kind; nor, on the other hand, let him suppose
that under the false cloak of devotion or of
piety, he may secretly indulge his lu-
cious passions, and compound, as it were,
with God for his remission of acts of gene-
rality, and purchase by his wealth a general
immunity to do. Let him not in short content
himself with being only half a Christian. Let
him, like as often as he pleases, the fatherless
and the widows in their affliction. Let his
piety be lively, and his faith sincere. But let
him, at the same time, take care as he values
his salvation, that he keep himself unspotted
from the world.

SERMON VII*.

2 KINGS iv. 1.

THY SERVANT MY HUSBAND IS DEAD, AND
THOU KNOWEST THAT THY SERVANT
DID FEAR THE LORD; AND THE CRE-
DITOR IS COME TO TAKE UNTO HIM MY
TWO SONS TO BE BOND-MEN.

THE unhappy sufferer, who makes this
most moving complaint, was the wi-
dow of one of the sons of the prophets, whose
distress Elisha immediately relieved by the
miraculous increase of her pot of oil. It will
not be easy to find in any writer, sacred or
profane, a more piteous story, or a case more
applicable to the occasion of the present meet-
ing. I cannot therefore do better than leave
it upon your minds in that concise and affecting
simplicity in which it is here related, whilst

* Preached at the anniversary meeting of the Sons of the
Clergy, May 9, 1776.

I proceed to recommend the distressed widows and children of the English clergy to your benevolent protection.

The nature and design of the several charitable institutions, which have now brought us together, are, I presume, so well understood in this place, that there can be no need to take up any of your time in explaining them*. The generous support they have hitherto met with demands our most grateful acknowledgments; and in order to keep this friendly disposition towards us alive and warm in your breasts, I shall attempt to show that

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* But it may not perhaps be generally known that there are three distinct societies formed for the benefit of the indigent widows and children of the clergy, and all closely connected with each other.

The first and principal, is *The Corporation for the Relief of the poor Widows and Children of Clergymen*, established by charter in the reign of King Charles the Second. The funds of this charity are employed chiefly in giving pensions to the widows of the clergy.

The second, which rose not long after, is *The Society of the Feast of the Sons of the Clergy*, consisting of the company annually assembled under that name at St. Paul's church, and Merchant Taylors Hall. The money collected at those two places is wholly expended in apprenticing out the children of necessitous clergymen. The expences of the music and the feast are generously defrayed by the stewards of that society.

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the clergy of the Church of England have, both on account of their *public services*, and (with respect to too large a part) their *private necessities*, a peculiar claim to your kind attention and assistance.

If we go back to the early ages of Christianity, our own Ecclesiastics had their share, with others of the sacred order, in first introducing the light of the Gospel into this country; and in sacrificing to its advancement their ease, their health, their fortunes, their lives. When in after-times, by a variety of concurrent causes, this kingdom was, in common with all its neighbours, overwhelmed with the

The third, is *The Society of Stewards and Subscribers for maintaining and educating the poor Orphans of the Clergy till of age to be put Apprentices.*

This society was formed in the year 1749. It is composed of those who have been stewards of the former society, and any others who chuse to become members of it. It is supported by annual subscriptions of one guinea each, and maintains two schools, one for boys, and the other for girls, in which the orphans of the clergy are educated till they are of sufficient age to go out to apprenticeships.

It might be of use if a short and clear account of these societies was printed in a small tract, describing their nature and design, together with the proper time and method of applying to them for relief, and the persons to whom such applications should be made.

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most deplorable darkness and ignorance; and when that stupendous fabric of popish tyranny and superstition was, like another Babel, raised up with incredible art and diligence, to the very skies; yet still the Christian clergy in general, and ours among the rest, were of no small benefit to the community. It is acknowledged by an historian, who has never betrayed any partiality to our order, that in the period we are speaking of, "the profession and (let me add) *"the disposition* of the churchmen, averse to arms and violence, tempered the general turn to military enterprises, and maintained, even amidst the shock of arms, those secret links without which it is impossible for human society to subsist*." Nay, even many privileges of the order that were justly looked upon with a jealous eye, yet proved, in those turbulent ages, a check to the despotism of our monarchs, and at the same time kept the community from falling to pieces by the factions and quarrels of the nobles. And it ought never to be forgotten, that for what we call our **MAGNA CHARTA**, that main foundation (as

* Home's Hist. of England, Hen. III. vol. ii. p. 10. 1st edit. 4to. 1762.

It is generally held to be) of our free constitution, we are principally indebted to the eloquence, the spirit, and the activity of an English primate*, assisted and supported by almost the whole body of his clergy. It is true, indeed, in other respects the conduct of our Ecclesiastics was not always so irreproachable as might have been wished; for they must needs partake in some degree of the corruption and barbarity which then generally prevailed. Yet great numbers of them did, notwithstanding, preserve themselves pure and undefiled from the vices of the age, and were exemplary in their manners, temperate, charitable, meek and heavenly-minded. Their cloysters were a retreat not merely, as is commonly supposed, for the idle and dissolute, but for the

* Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury; "a man whose memory," says the historian above-mentioned, "ought always to be respected by the English." Vol. I. p. 382.

In the following reign the abbots and prelates were very instrumental in obtaining the same security from Hen. III. and they endeavoured to guard against all future violations of it by a most tremendous ceremony. They stood round the GREAT CHARTER, whilst it was read in parliament, with burning tapers in their hands, and denounced the sentence of excommunication against every one that should thenceforth dare to infringe that fundamental law. Ib. Vol. II. p. 25, 26.

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studious,

studious, the afflicted, the penitent and the devout. They afforded support to all the neighbouring poor, and in those days of lawless violence, were extremely useful as places of refuge and security to the defenceless and the weak. In them too were deposited many of those precious remains of antiquity which we now peruse with so much delight, and which, had it not been for the protection they found in religious houses, would, in all probability, have perished by the hands of those barbarians that spread ruin and desolation over Europe. In these peaceful sanctuaries, the leisure and tranquillity which the monks enjoyed, enabled them not only to record (however uncouthly) the transactions of their own times, but to transcribe the compositions of former and more valuable writers. Nor was this the only object of their attention. They found time to cultivate even some of the finer arts. Those sublime powers of harmony, which have been this very day so nobly and laudably exerted in the cause of the fatherless and the widow, owe their birth in this country to monastic diligence and ingenuity. Both the theory and the practice of music were first studied and taught here,

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and in other parts of Europe, by the regular clergy * ; and what is now the delight and amusement of all ranks of people, was originally the offspring of Religion, and appropriated solely to the purpose of animating devotion, and giving dignity and solemnity to the service of the church. The monks drew up a large number of treatises on this subject, which, notwithstanding the barbarism of the times, were written with great perspicuity, method, and precision ; and they had seminaries of young people under their care, whom they instructed in the rudiments of this science. Libraries were also formed in all the monasteries, and schools founded in them and near most of the cathedrals, for teaching the literature of the times †. And thus was learning kept alive at least, though in a very languid state, till the art of printing was found out. Even that most useful art itself was, according to the opinion of some learned men, which seems to be well founded, first brought into our island by the care and generosity of an

* See Dr. Burney's Hist. of Music, vol. ii. p. 68. And Sir John Hawkins's Preliminary Disc. p. 48 to 53; and vol. v. p. 112, 113.

† Vide Mosheim's Hist. Eccles. sec. vi. par. ii. c. 1. p. 237.

English primate *. In the restoration of letters, which quickly followed, the Ecclesiastics took the lead, and contributed more than any other set of men to introduce a true taste for every branch of polite and useful learning into this country. From that period to the present, they have always made a distinguished figure in the whole circle of sciences and arts; their writings have ever ranked amongst the purest of their times; and let the occasion excuse me if I add, (the proofs of what I say are before the world) that our profession is at this very day adorned by men, who, in genius, learning, judgment, taste, and elegance of composition, have few if any superiors.

Whoever, then, is a friend to literature and

* Archbishop Bouchier; who persuaded Henry VI. to furnish one Mr. Robert Turneur with a thousand marks (towards which the archbishop contributed three hundred), and to send him privately to Harlem, in company with Caxton, in order to fetch from thence the new-invented art of printing; which he did accordingly, by bringing over to England Frederick Corfellis, one of the compositors at Harlem. See Biograph. Britann. art. Bouchier. Dr. Middleton, indeed, and others, have endeavoured to disprove the truth of this story; but their most material objections to it have been well answered by Mr. Meerman, in his very curious and learned work, intituled, *Origines Typographicae*, vol. ii.

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the fine arts, must be a friend to the English clergy, and will chearfully contribute to the relief of that order which has so largely contributed to his information and amusement. But they have still more substantial services than these to plead. To them you stand principally indebted, not only for the restoration of letters, but the revival of true Religion. For although the first opposition made here to the usurpations of the Church of Rome took its rise from the passions of an impetuous prince, yet the work of reformation itself was undoubtedly begun, carried on, and compleated by the hands of the English clergy. In this glorious cause they wrote with irresistible strength of argument, and suffered with invincible fortitude of mind. To their labours, their piety and learning, their judgment and moderation, you owe that pure mode of worship, and that excellent form of public prayer you now enjoy; the constant use of which in the Church of England has undoubtedly, in more respects than one, been of infinite service to the people of this kingdom. And when, at a subsequent period, our religious as well as civil liberties were in the most imminent danger of being
destroyed

destroyed by the intemperate zeal of a bigotted and despotic monarch, then again did the clergy courageously step forth in defence of both. From them originated one of the very first parliamentary checks to the violences of James II.* By their excellent discourses and writings against popery, the people were first roused to a just abhorrence of that dangerous superstition †. By their decent, yet manly firmness, in supporting their invaded rights, the rest of the nation was inspired with a similar resolution to resist the precipitate and unconstitutional measures of an infatuated court; and throughout the whole of that memorable and glorious transaction, their behaviour was at once so prudent and intrepid, so suitable to

* Henry Compton, bishop of London, in the name of his brethren, made a motion in the House of Lords to take into consideration King James's famous speech in the second session of parliament, in which he signified his intention of *dispensing* with the Test-acts. The bishop's motion was carried. Hume's Hist. vol. vi. p. 390.—I have referred to this historian all along, for no other reason, than because his testimony, when given in *favour* of the clergy (whom he sincerely hated) is unexceptionable.

† To the same eminent persons we owe the subversion of the whole system of Atheistic Philosophy, from its very foundations. See the Bishop of Worcester's Sermons, S. i. p. 23.

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their profession, and so friendly to the righteous cause of genuine liberty and pure religion, that they received one of the highest and most flattering rewards with which a British subject can be honoured, the unanimous thanks of the Commons of Great-Britain in Parliament assembled *.

These, perhaps it will be said, though important, are past services, and are calculated to prove, not what we ourselves, but what our predecessors have done for the public. Yet surely they are reasons for esteeming the order in general, for bearing testimony to the merits of those who have formerly adorned it,

* Journals of the House of Commons, Feb. 1, 1688.

Among other instances of cool yet resolute opposition to the despotism of James by the prelates and clergy of the Church of England at this momentous period, the reader will recollect with peculiar veneration and gratitude, Bishop Compton's refusal to comply with the king's illegal order to suspend Dr. Sharp, for preaching against popery; the resistance made by Dr. Hough, and the Fellows of Magdalen College in Oxford, to the king's arbitrary mandate in favour of a popish president; and the truly noble and patriotic conduct of the seven bishops who were sent to the Tower, and brought to a public trial for their petition to the throne against the second Declaration of Indulgence founded on the *Dispensing Power*. These acts of magnanimity on the part of the English clergy, indisputably prepared and led the way to the great and glorious events which soon after followed.

and for exercising every act of kindness and humanity towards the persons who succeed them in their ministry. And even these, we hope, have something to plead in their behalf. They have not, we trust, materially departed from the principles of their ancestors. The English clergy, we do not scruple to say, are still zealously attached to the interests of virtue and religion; are still, in general, faithful, diligent, and regular in the discharge of their sacred functions. They are still sincere friends to *real constitutional* freedom; and the very same love of it, which at the Revolution led them to refuse a slavish and unlimited obedience to the illegal mandates of arbitrary power, induces them now to promote, both by their doctrine and their example, that dutiful respect, and conscientious submission to all lawful authority, which the Gospel most peremptorily enjoins; the extreme want of which is at present but too visible, and yet without which no true liberty can long subsist. But although, on these grounds, they have judged it expedient to throw their weight into the scale of government, yet they have done this without any unbecoming vehemence or heat;

heat; and amidst all the violent dissensions which have lately agitated this kingdom, they have, as a body, conducted themselves with a degree of prudence, temper, mildness and moderation, which must do them no small credit in the eyes of every unprejudiced observer*. And that, in other respects, their talents, their learning, and their morals, are such as have gained them general approbation and esteem, may be collected from this single circumstance; that when you want to find out proper instructors for your children, you naturally turn your thoughts to the clergy; and it is in their hands, in their houses, you chuse to place whatever you hold most dear and valuable in the world. To them, in short, has long been, and still is, confided that most important trust, the education of youth; a trust, which it is no vain boast to say, they have discharged with fidelity and ability†. Under their direction, the schools and universities of this kingdom have

* These remarks, though first made in the year 1776, are no less true at the present moment.

† How well qualified they are for this employment, has been fully shewn by a consummate judge of the subject of education, in the *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel*. 1st ed. Dial. 2. p. 183. The attentive perusal of these inimitable dialogues is

have acquired an acknowledged superiority over all the other seminaries of Europe. In their colleges have been formed most of those great and illustrious characters that have contributed to the glory and prosperity of this country: and even among that large number of persons here present, there are few, I apprehend, who have not, at some period of their lives, derived considerable benefit from the instructions of our order.

These known and undeniable facts are, we conceive, very unequivocal proofs of our good conduct and good estimation; and ought greatly to outweigh all those unmerited calumnies which are so often thrown both upon the order in general, and the individuals of which it is composed, by those who know very little of either *. That there are in ours, as in every other profession, several unworthy members,

strongly recommended to all those who prefer a foreign university to our own, or who suffer their sons to ramble over Europe at an early and most dangerous period of life, not only without a clerical governor, but even sometimes without any governor at all.

* "The rule," says a great and good prelate, "which most of our adversaries seem to have set themselves is, to be at all adventures as bitter as they can; and they follow it not only
"beyond

members, it is in vain to deny; and where can be the wonder, if in so very numerous a society some apostates should be found? But take the whole in one collective view, and it may with the greatest truth be affirmed, that you will no where find, either in ancient or modern times, a body of more than ten thousand persons, situated in the midst of a populous, rich, commercial, luxurious kingdom, surrounded with every temptation, and every danger to which virtue can be exposed, whose morals are so blameless, and so little injured by the general contagion, as those of the English clergy. With respect to that part of them, more especially, whose families (when they themselves shall be no more) will probably want the protection of this charity, it is but justice to them to say, that their conduct renders them worthy of every act of kindness

“ beyond truth, but beyond probability; asserting the very
 “ worst things of us without foundation, and exaggerating every
 “ thing without mercy; imputing the faults, and sometimes
 “ imaginary faults of particular persons, to the whole order;
 “ and then declaiming against us all promiscuously with such
 “ wild vehemence, as, in any case but ours, they themselves
 “ would think in the highest degree cruel and unjust.” *Secker's*

Charges p. 5.

which their poverty may require. Contented, humble, modest, patient, and laborious, their lives are divided between fulfilling the duties of their profession, and struggling with the difficulties of their situation. Nay, it is to their virtue chiefly that these very distresses are owing. They are formed with the same passions and propensities as other men; and were they as little scrupulous about the means of gratifying them as others too commonly are; had they adopted that very commodious system of modern ethics, which ranks hypocrisy and adultery among the requisites of a good education, there would certainly be no need for us ever to become your petitioners for their widows and children. But as they have been trained up in a religion which requires unblemished purity of manners and of heart, they think themselves bound to keep within the limits prescribed by their heavenly Master, and to allow themselves no gratifications but those which he has pronounced lawful and honourable. Hence they are often induced to contract early marriages, and find themselves surrounded by a numerous family before they are provided with the means of supporting
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them. At the same time they are expected to live creditably, and to maintain a decent hospitality amongst their neighbours. To them the poor, the sick, the distressed part of their flock, naturally look up, as their chief refuge and support; and in some small villages (if you except parochial relief) the minister of the parish is almost the only resource they have. These demands he is commonly inclined to answer to the utmost of his power. Perhaps, too, he may have the misfortune of a little taste for books, which is not indulged without expence; and from his acquaintance with the best and purest writers of antiquity, as well as from the habits and connections of his early years, he may have acquired sentiments and feelings far beyond the straitness of his circumstances, and the humility of his condition. Hence, besides the large sums which he is often obliged to expend on the necessary repairs of his parsonage, he may possibly be induced to add a few conveniences to it: he may even be tempted, by the natural beauties of its situation, to expend more in improving and adorning his little territories, and in rendering them comfortable and delightful to himself and

those that follow him; than in strict prudence he ought. In a few years his sons must be sent to schools and universities, or to trades and professions: and if, perchance, he should be ambitious of giving his daughters also a few useful accomplishments, let us pardon him this wrong; it is the only fortune he can give them. These expences necessarily oblige him to anticipate his narrow income, and to contract, perhaps, a considerable debt; a load which often lies so heavy upon his mind, that it brings him prematurely down with sorrow to the grave. Then it is that his wife and children find themselves plunged not only in the severest affliction, but in embarrassments out of which they are utterly unable to extricate themselves. It is then the widow may, with but too much propriety, address herself to every one of us in the words of the text, "Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord, and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bond-men." Her children cannot, indeed, in this land of freedom, be literally carried into bondage; but it is necessary, both for their subsistence and her's,

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that they should all, in one way or other, be taken away from her, and subjected probably to much harsher usage than they had hitherto experienced. The head is gone, and the little society is dissolved; they must quit the beloved mansion where they have spent their lives, and which they have made so neat and cheerful at their own cost, perhaps with the labour of their own hands. The small remnant of books and furniture, that constituted all their wealth, they see disposed of for the benefit of their creditors; and then—they have nothing to do but to disperse themselves where they can to seek support.

In this critical moment it is that these charitable establishments open their friendly arms to receive them, and each bears its respective part in ministering to their necessities*. *The Incorporate Society* takes the widow under its immediate protection, and allows her a decent pension so long as her condition and her circumstances continue unchanged. *The Society of Stewards and Subscribers*, instituted in the year 1749, undertakes the maintenance and education of her children till they are of age

* See the note above, pag. 152, 153.

to be apprenticed; and when they are of sufficient age, *The Society of the Feast of the Sons of the Clergy* provides them with proper masters, and puts them into a way of obtaining a comfortable subsistence, and becoming useful members of society.

Thus, you see, each of these excellent institutions has its proper use and peculiar department; and all of them concur in forming one noble comprehensive plan of national charity. But this plan can never be carried into execution without the aid of the wealthy and the great. The Corporation has indeed a fund of its own; but this fund, without occasional donations and benefactions, would be very inadequate to the objects that stand in need of its assistance. As to the other two humane societies, one of which educates the poor orphans which the other places out in the world; these, I say, are entirely supported by voluntary contributions and subscriptions; and you will not, I am sure, through an ill-judged parsimony, suffer any of our little ones to perish*.

Yet, notwithstanding the apparent utility, and even necessity, of these benevolent found-

* Matth. xviii. 14.

dations, their friends have with no small concern observed, that they have for some time past been rather losing ground than gaining it. For this, various reasons have been assigned; but none, I apprehend, of sufficient weight to abate any thing of our ardour in support of such generous designs. It has been thought by some, that there is now the less need for a general contribution of this nature for the widows and children of the clergy, because there are in particular dioceses several local institutions of the same kind. It is true there are; but they are not near so universal as might be wished: they reach only, I conceive, to a small part of the kingdom, and their operation is of course confined within a narrow compass. But were they much more numerous than they are, were they even spread through every part of the island, yet still this original parent of them all ought to be preserved and fostered with religious veneration and care. For the growing increase of expence in many necessary articles of life, makes a proportionable increase in the wants of the poorer clergy, which by this means keep pace with the provisions made in their favour; and they can but ill spare the

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loss of any assistance, whether general or local, which they have been accustomed to receive.

There is still another circumstance which may have contributed to the decrease of our collections, and that is the great number of other public charities of various kinds, which have of late years been established in this kingdom. And if this is really the case, we must not, we do not, complain. If others cannot be benefited but by our loss, we are content. But when we find ourselves in the very center of the richest commercial city in the world †, we cannot possibly entertain the least apprehensions on this head. In any other place, perhaps, there might be room to fear that the stream of beneficence, when divided into several new channels, might forsake the old. But be these channels ever so numerous, *your* liberality can fill them all. It is as inexhaustible as your wealth, which is daily flowing in upon you from every quarter of the globe, and can enrich and fertilize a vast variety of different regions at the same time. Let then other charities spring up in whatever

† This sermon was preached in St. Paul's church, in the presence of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, &c. of the city of London.

numbers they will; we look not upon them with an envious or jealous eye; we consider them not as rivals, but as sharers, in your bounty, which is able to embrace both them and us. Far from wishing to discourage, far from wishing to depreciate, other benevolent institutions, and to form invidious comparisons between them and ours, we sincerely wish them, on the contrary, all imaginable success, in full confidence that in a capital like this it will not, it cannot, be any obstruction to our own. You yourselves are our witnesses, that there are none more ready to countenance every humane design than the English clergy†. There is hardly one public charity to be named that has not some of our order amongst its friends and supporters; and if we have any gifts of eloquence, any powers of persuasion to boast, they are always ready at your call to recommend every generous plan that you think fit to patronize; your schools, your hospitals,

† One very recent and remarkable proof of this ought not to be passed over in silence. Mr. Hetherington, a private clergyman, gave birth, within these few years, to a new and most judicious species of charity. He established an annual provision for fifty blind persons, and appropriated, *in his life-time*, to this excellent purpose, a fund of twenty thousand pounds.

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your sick, your prisoners, your poor. That assistance, then, which we are ever disposed to give, we now hope in our turn to receive. Strike out into as many different paths of benevolence as you please; yet desert not, we beseech you, the old, the tried, the approved one, to which you have been so long accustomed. This charity † has always been your favourite child; it has been born and bred amongst you; you have hitherto nursed and cherished it with the tenderest care; do not now abandon it to the wide world, where it is not yet strong enough to make its way without your help.

You have seen, I trust, upon the whole, that they for whose families we beg relief, “are worthy for whom you should do this ‡:” that those on whom they depended for support and whose help they have lost, were, both by profession and by principle, most useful members of society; and yet were unable to leave their children any other inheritance than that of extreme poverty, aggravated by the remembrance of happier days, and by minds suscep-

† Including the three different branches of it above-mentioned, p. 152, 153.

‡ Luke vii. 4.

tible of the keenest feelings. May these considerations have their due influence on your hearts ! And may we, my reverend brethren, never forget that it is in our power, by our future conduct, to give these considerations whatever weight we think fit ! If we do not give them all we can ; if, in proportion as we stand more in need of public favour, we do not redouble our endeavours to deserve it ; by a discreet inoffensive behaviour and conversation, by residence on our preferments, by a close attention to the proper studies and functions of our profession, by fervent piety, by extensive charity, by meekness and humility, by a disinterested and ardent zeal for the advancement of religion, and the salvation of mankind ; if, I say, by these, and such like evangelical virtues, we do not support the credit of our character, and by real usefulness acquire veneration and esteem ; we shall be no less blind to our interest, than unmindful of our duty both to God and man *

* See Archbishop Secker's truly pastoral Charges throughout ; which well deserve the serious attention of every sincere and conscientious clergyman in every rank of the profession.

S E R M O N V I I I .

ECCLESIASTES xii. i.

REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR IN THE
DAYS OF THY YOUTH.

THE reason why we are here, and in other places of Scripture, more particularly enjoined to remember God IN OUR YOUTH, is obvious ; it is, because we are then most apt to forget him. Indeed, in every stage of life as well as this, the cares and pleasures of the world too often engross our chief attention, and banish for a while the remembrance of our Maker. But it is in youth only we seem to be sunk in a total forgetfulness of Religion, and “ to have not God in all our thoughts.” In a more advanced age, reason becomes so strong, or appetite so weak, that even in the busiest and the gayest scenes, we must have some in-

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tervals

tervals of thinking, we must have our solitary and serious moments, in which the idea of a God *will* recur and force itself upon our minds. The calamities and disappointments which we meet with, as we travel forwards in this vale of tears, the loss of friends or of fortune, acute pains, and lingering diseases, are so many awakening instances of our weakness and dependence, and compel us, in spite of indolence or pride, to look up to Heaven, and our Father that is in Heaven, for assistance and protection. But in youth, these faithful monitors are wanting; there are, then, generally speaking, no cares or afflictions to remind us of our Creator, and bring us to a just sense of our duty. The novelty of the objects that successively surround us at our first entrance into life, supplies us with a perpetual fund of entertainment; and an uninterrupted flow of health and spirits “fills
 “our mouth with laughter, and our tongue with
 “joy.” We find ourselves happy, and consider not who it was that made us so; we find ourselves in a wide theatre of action, and without thinking how we are to perform our respective parts upon it, survey with rapture those alluring scenes that every where open to our
 view,

view, and launch out in pursuit of the pleasures that are before us with so much eagerness and precipitation, as to leave no time either to trace them backwards to their source, or forwards to their consequences. From these false steps in our setting out, flow most of the fatal errors and miscarriages of our future conduct; and for want of a little recollection when we are young, we too often lay up a store of misery for the remaining part of our existence here, and for all eternity hereafter.

Since, then, in our early years, we are for the most part destitute of those useful mementos, and those favourable seasons of recollection, which occur so often in the other parts of life; and are, therefore, more particularly prone to forget our Maker, at a time when it least becomes us so to do, the admonition contained in the text must seem highly proper, and cannot be too often inculcated, in order to supply, in some measure, that unhappy insensibility, that inattention to every thing serious and religious, which is so generally observable, and so much complained of, in youth.

No man could be more sensible of this, or more seriously lament it, than the ROYAL PREACHER from whom these words are taken. He saw a melancholy instance of it in the conduct of his own son, who began now probably to give some indications of that fiery and ungovernable temper, which afterwards proved so fatal to himself, and to his kingdom. He, therefore, urges the necessity of remembering God in our youth, not only with all the authority of an experienced sage, and an inspired writer, but with all the tenderness of a parent solicitous for the welfare and prosperity of his child.

And this may, perhaps, be one reason of those frequent and pressing exhortations to an early piety, which are every where scattered up and down in his writings. They had, however, no doubt a view to the depravity of youth in general, as well as of Rehoboam in particular; and as we may, I think, venture to say, that there is at least as much occasion for a repeated injunction of this duty in the present times, as in the days of Solomon; it shall be the business of this discourse to recommend and enforce an early piety, by showing,
first,

first, the reasonableness and propriety of it; and, secondly, by pointing out some of the principal advantages which will attend the practice of it.

I. First, then, I am to show the reasonableness and propriety of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth.

And here it is evident, that by remembering our Creator, we are not merely to understand a habit of recalling the bare idea of him to our mind, or a cold, lifeless contemplation of his existence, but such a fervent, affectionate, grateful remembrance, as is sometimes kindled in our breasts by thinking on an absent or a departed friend, when every tender circumstance of that endearing connection rushes in upon the soul, and all his friendly offices, all the pleasing instances of his love and kindness towards us, present themselves at once to our view. We must not only remember that he is, but that he is our Creator, and that with all those sentiments of piety and love, which such a relation naturally suggests. We must remember that he gave us life and all its blessings, all that we actually enjoy here, or hope to enjoy hereafter; and we must show the

reality of this remembrance by making a suitable return for such invaluable favours. For even in the most familiar forms of speaking, to remember a kindness is to requite it; and the only return that a creature can make to his Creator, is an uniform obedience to his will, and a punctual observance of all his laws. But that which the text more particularly recommends to the young man, is the remembrance of God as *his Creator*, not only because the communication of existence of course includes every other blessing, but because this consideration is more peculiarly adapted to the circumstances of those to whom the precept is addressed. For if even when life is become familiar to us, when we have tasted its sorrows as well as its joys, the remembrance of our Creator is yet apt sometimes to excite the warmest returns of gratitude and devotion, how ought this reflection to work on the hearts of those who are, as it were, fresh from the hands of their Maker, and unacquainted with every thing in life but its blessings? How can the young man forbear breaking out with the royal psalmist into that passionate overflowing of a grateful heart; "Praise the Lord,
" O my

“ O my soul, and all that is within me praise
 “ his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul,
 “ and forget not all his benefits : who for-
 “ giveth all thy sins, and healeth all thine in-
 “ firmities ; who saveth thy life from destruc-
 “ tion, and crowneth thee with mercy and
 “ loving kindness ; who satisfieth thy mouth
 “ with good things, making thee young and
 “ lusty as an eagle *.” One would imagine,
 indeed, that instead of thinking it could ever
 be too soon, men should rather fear it would
 be always full late, to remember their Creator,
 and that life itself would be short enough for
 making returns to his unbounded mercies ;
 yet such is the strange perverseness, shall I call
 it, or thoughtlessness of youth, that the good-
 ness of God generally produces a quite contrary
 effect ; and that profusion of happiness, which
 ought to bind them for ever to his service, is
 the very thing that supplants him in their
 affections, and banishes the remembrance of
 him from their minds. Their pleasures and
 pursuits follow so close upon one another, as
 to leave no room for any serious reflections to
 intervene ; or if, by chance, any religious

* Psalm ciii. v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

thought intrude upon the series of their joys, they instantly dismiss the unbidden, unwelcome guest, with the answer of Felix to Paul; "Go thy way for this time, when we have a convenient season we will send for thee." But let not the young man flatter himself that any season is so convenient as the present, or that God will be content with the dregs of life, and the refuse of his years; let him not foolishly imagine, that after having spent his best days in the service of sin, the wretched remains of them are an offering fit for his Creator; or that a soul polluted with guilt, and a body emaciated with disease, will be accepted at the altar of the Almighty. No; he demands the first and fairest of all our days, the first and purest motions of the heart; the first fruits "of that vineyard which his right hand hath planted, and of the branch that he made so strong for himself *."

It can be, indeed, but little proof of our loyalty not to rebel against our Sovereign, when we have not strength to take up arms, and there are no temptations to make us swerve from our allegiance; but if, when we

* Psalm lxxx. v. 15.

are in our full strength and vigour ; when the danger is near, and the enemy at the gate, trying every method to subdue our virtue, and corrupt our fidelity ; if we then withstand in the evil day, reject his offers, repel his violence, elude his stratagems, and baffle all his attempts, we shall then, indeed, show ourselves good subjects and faithful soldiers of our heavenly Master ; we shall have fought the good fight of faith, and when death shall release us from our station, may humbly hope to receive, through the merits of our Redeemer, the wages of our Christian warfare ; not those perishable crowns, and that visionary immortality, which are the poor rewards of earthly heroes, but a crown of glory that fadeth not away, a real immortality of happiness in Heaven.

But this consideration more properly belongs to the second head, under which I proposed to consider some of the principal advantages arising from a course of early piety.

II. And first ; he who remembers his Creator in the days of his youth, may depend upon it, that his Creator will not forget him all the days of his life. A religious young
person

person is, above all others, peculiarly acceptable to the Almighty ; an object upon which he looks down with an eye of uncommon favour and approbation. There cannot, indeed, be conceived a spectacle more great and lovely, than to see a young man struggling with the temptations of the world, the tyranny of custom, the solicitations of evil company, and the strength of evil passions. To see him not “ meanly following a multitude to do evil,” but bravely stemming the popular torrent ; and whilst those around him deviate either on the one hand into the beaten road of vice, or on the other into the endless mazes of gaiety and folly ; to see him left standing alone with virtue in the midst, and daring to be singularly good. To see the vigour of his understanding not sunk in sensuality, or dissipated in trifles, but rising to the noblest pursuits after truth and virtue ; and the alacrity of his spirits not exhausted in the wild fallies of intemperate mirth, in ruining his own and others innocence, and disturbing the peace and order of society ; but exerting itself in the most lively display of every generous and social duty, in giving life to his devotions, and atchieving the conquest

conquest over his passions. To see him, in short, sacrificing the flower of his days, his gaieties, his pleasures, and diversions, at the altar of his Creator; and, in spite of the impotent wit and raillery of his gay companions, in spite of all the obstructions that the wickedness of man, or the deceitfulness of his own heart, can throw in his way, steadily and resolutely persevering in a uniform course of piety and virtue to the last.

It cannot fail, but such an one must, in the ordinary course of things, draw down upon himself the choicest blessings of Heaven. He sets out in life with fairer prospects and greater advantages than all his rival contemporaries, with the blessing of God upon all his undertakings, and a moral assurance, that whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper. And it must surely be a most comfortable reflection to him, that "he thus grows under the defence of the Most High, and flourishes under the shadow of the Almighty." It must give life to all his designs, inspire him with a manly fortitude in all his resolutions, and diffuse an even cheerfulness and composure through his whole deportment, whilst, like his blessed Master in

the same period of life, "he grows in stature
 "and in wisdom, and in favour with God and
 "man*."

2. By remembering God in our youth, we
 save the pains of recollecting him in old age,
 "when the evil days come, (as come they
 "assuredly will) in which we shall say, we
 "have no pleasure in them." If Religion is
 a lesson we must some time or other learn, we
 cannot begin too soon. It is not a thing to be
 taken up at our leisure, a work to be done
 when we have nothing else to do; but will
 find full employment for all the time and pains
 we can bestow upon it. Youth is the time
 when the seeds of every Christian grace and
 virtue are to be sown in our hearts. If we
 neglect this favourable season, and suffer the
 tares to spring up in their room, we shall not
 only have the painful task of implanting new
 affections and new desires in a worn-out soil,
 but of eradicating the old ones; and that, too,
 when they have grown up with us so long,
 and are so interwoven with our very consti-
 tutions, that to rend them away from the soul,
 will be like plucking out an eye, or tearing

* Luke ii. 52.

off a limb from the body. The Scriptures have laboured to express, in the strongest terms, the extreme difficulty of such an undertaking, and made use of the boldest figures to impress a deep sense of it upon our minds. They call such a reformation in an advanced age, "becoming a new creature, putting off the " old man and putting on the new," and compare it to " the leopard changing its spots, and " the Ethiopian his skin *." Indeed, the great hardship of the task may well justify such expressions; and if any one considers what pains it costs him, to wean himself even from the most whimsical and trifling customs which he has accidentally acquired and long indulged, he will easily conceive what inward pangs and agonies he must undergo, before he can entirely eradicate habits that are grafted on the strongest natural desires; and effect such a total change in the whole frame and temper, in the colour and complexion of his mind, as is absolutely necessary to render his reformation effectual.

We are told, indeed, in Scripture, that " the ways of Religion are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace;" and

* 2 Cor. v. 17. Ephes. iv. 22. 24. Jer. xiii. 23.

so they most certainly are; but it is to those only who have been accustomed to walk in them from their youth up. The gate that leadeth to this way is narrow and strait, and the road, at first, so rugged and uneven, that if we do not enter upon it till "the day is far spent, and the night draweth on," we shall neither have time nor strength to surmount the many obstacles we shall meet with. But if the young man sets out in the morning of life, the freshness of his strength and spirits, aided by the influences of divine grace, will carry him through every difficulty. As he advances forwards, his toil grows less; the asperities of the way gradually disappear; the path grows wider, and the prospect opens, till he sees at last, with the eye of faith, that land of promise to which he hastens; a sight that cheers and revives him; when, after the labours of his journey, his soul begins to faint within him. And this suggests to us a third advantage resulting from an early sense of Religion, namely, the satisfaction and comfort it will afford us on the bed of death.

3. However the young libertine may now boast himself, and triumph in his impiety, and
laugh

laugh at the scrupulous timidity of those who deny themselves a thousand pleasures, which *he* boldly snatches without hesitation or remorse, yet there will come a time, and God knows how soon it may come, when his heart will quake for fear, when he will believe and tremble. Nor must he vainly flatter himself that the evil day is far off, or that when it does come, he shall face it with the same steadiness and intrepidity with which he now affronts his Maker. For whilst he sees "thousands even of his own age, fall beside him, and ten thousand at his right hand," how can he be sure that the danger will not come nigh him, especially as he takes the surest method to bring it near him, and to quicken the pace of death by his intemperance. It must, however, at last overtake him; and when it does, all his vaunted courage will at once desert him. The stoutest hearts will fail, and the fiercest spirits will be broken, when that dreadful day arrives. Our own history, and that of other nations, will furnish us with abundant instances, where the boldest chiefs in iniquity, who have gloried in the most open and avowed contempt of Religion, have yet been

been so utterly dismayed at the approach of death, as to sink into the most abject superstition and unmanly complaints. It is not that enterprizing spirit which carries a man so successfully through this world, that will avail him in his entrance on the next. Nothing can then support him amidst the terrors of dissolution, and the pangs of parting with all that is dear and near to him, but the reflection on a well-spent life; and as we shall stand in need of every possible increase of comfort, we ought to sweeten this reflection all we can, by beginning early to remember God. For we must not imagine, what some are willing to persuade themselves, that a late repentance will have the same effect upon our minds in our last moments, as a life that needed no repentance. They who think so, show themselves to be utter strangers to the real situation of a dying man. They know not the terror and amazement, the fears and apprehensions, of a soul that stands trembling on the brink of eternity, and whose salvation depends on a late repentance. He fears, he knows not what, about the sincerity of that repentance; he fears his contrition may not have been deep enough,
his

his amendment not complete; that some crimes may not have appeared to him in their full guilt and baseness, and some may have entirely escaped his search. He enhances every real danger, and creates to himself a thousand more; and whatever may be the efficacy of that repentance, with regard to his *future* condition, it cannot in his *present* yield him that comfortable hope, that humble confidence in the merits of his Redeemer, which is absolutely necessary to the quiet of the mind, in so interesting a point. This can only be the result of a life, in which, upon the most impartial review, there appears nothing to lament but those frailties and infirmities which man cannot but sometimes fall into, and which God, through the mediation and death of Christ, has most graciously promised to forgive. And in this review, the further we can cast our eyes backwards on our sincere, though imperfect endeavours after holiness, and the nearer we can trace up the beginning of our religious obedience to the beginning of life, the more pleasing will be the retrospect, the more unallayed our satisfaction. Every impulse of passion we have subdued, every temp-

tation we have resisted or escaped, every evil thought we have restrained, and every good one we have encouraged, will then each rise up to befriend us, and speak peace to our affrighted souls. And though the religious young man may now, perhaps, complain of the difficulties he hath to struggle with, yet let him remember, that the bitterer his present sensations are, the more joyful will be his reflections at that momentous period. It is then, in short, and only then, we see the true difference between him that serveth God in his youth, and him that serveth him not; and whoever compares their different circumstances and behaviour on that trying occasion, will most sincerely wish "that he may die the death of the righteous, and that his latter end may be like his." But let us remember, that it is not a mere inactive *wish* alone that can procure us this inestimable blessing; let us remember, that if we would die the death of the righteous, we must seriously resolve from our youth up, to live his life, and that it will be in vain to pray that our latter end may be like his, unless our early years be like his also.

S E R M O N IX.

I KINGS xviii. 21.

AND ELIJAH CAME UNTO ALL THE PEOPLE,
AND SAID, HOW LONG HALT YE BE-
TWEEN TWO OPINIONS? IF THE LORD
BE GOD, FOLLOW HIM; BUT IF BAAL,
THEN FOLLOW HIM.

NOtwithstanding the many express com-
mands given to the Jews to worship
the one only true God, and the many admi-
rable provisions made in their law to preserve
them from the adoration of any other; yet
it is notorious, that from the time of their
leaving Egypt, down to the Babylonish cap-
tivity, they were frequently falling into ido-
latry. It must be observed, however, that this
idolatry of theirs, wicked and inexcusable as
it undoubtedly was, did not consist in ab-

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solutely

olutely renouncing the worship of the true God, but in joining with it the worship of false gods. This they did in imitation of the heathen nations around them, who, like all other pagans, though they had each their peculiar tutelary deities, yet made no scruple of associating those of any other people along with them. In conformity to which accommodating temper, the Jews themselves probably considering the God of Israel as their *national* God, imagined that their allegiance to him was not violated by admitting other local deities to a share in his worship. It was this absurd and impious custom of joining the adoration of idols to that of the true God, against which we find so many precepts and exhortations in the Old Testament directed, and such severe punishments denounced. And in opposition to this strange practice it was, that Elijah proposes to the idolatrous Ahab and his people, an effectual method of deciding which was the true God, Jehovah or Baal; and he introduces his proposal with that spirited expostulation, contained in the words of the text. “How long halt ye between two
“ opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him;
“ but

“but if Baal, then follow him.” This was in effect, saying, How long will ye act this base disingenuous part, of attempting to serve two masters, and to worship at once both the Lord and Baal? The Lord is a jealous God. He demands your whole affection. He will not be served by halves; he will not accept of a divided empire with Baal. Chuse ye, then, whom ye will serve, and no longer halt between two directly opposite and inconsistent opinions. If you are persuaded (and never had any people more reason to be persuaded) that the Lord Jehovah, the great Creator of Heaven and Earth, is the only true God, act agreeably to such a persuasion. Follow him, and him only; serve him sincerely, uniformly, and entirely, with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; and live a life of virtue and holiness, in obedience to his commands. But if, on the contrary, you can, in opposition to the plainest and strongest evidence, bring yourselves seriously to believe that Baal is God, follow *him*. Follow him (if your nature recoil not at it) through all those impure and detestable practices which his worship authorizes and requires. But come not thus reeking

with idolatry to the altar of the Lord. He will accept of no sacrifices from such polluted hands. Baal is then your God, and you are his people. To him alone offer up your vows; from him only expect the supply of all your wants, and deliverance from all your calamities.

The observation naturally arising from the text thus explained, is this: That as God would not allow a partial worship under the Mosaic dispensation, neither will he admit of partial faith, and partial obedience, under the Christian covenant.

He who was the God of the Jews, is also the God of the Christians; has from the same invariable pre-eminence of his divine nature, the same claim to our entire and unreserved submission to his will, is equally jealous of his own glory and of our allegiance, and equally averse to any rival in our affections, and our services. It was the duty of the Jew to believe and obey the whole law of Moses. It is the duty of the Christian to believe and obey the whole law of Christ. In opposition to the doctrines and duties of the Mosaic law, stood the extravagant conceits of Gentile theology,

logy, and the execrable impurities and barbarities of idolatrous worship. In opposition to the doctrines and duties of the Gospel, stand the fanciful refinements of modern philosophy, and the allurements of a sinful world, which are now too frequently distracting the belief, and dividing the obedience of Christians, as superstition and idolatry did formerly those of the Jews. And it is no more allowable to halt in our belief between deism and revelation, and in our practice between God and Mammon, than it was in the Jews formerly to follow at once both the Lord and Baal. The text, therefore, when divested of all peculiarity of circumstance, and brought home to ourselves, affords this general and useful principle, that we should not waver between two systems, and endeavour to serve at the same time two masters; but entirely devote ourselves either to the one or the other, and stand to all the consequences of our choice. This admonition seems not improperly calculated for the state of Religion among ourselves at this day, and may be applied with equal justice both to our faith and practice.

But I shall, in this discourse, confine my observations almost entirely to the latter, as being the most useful, and the best suited to the business of this place. For although much might be said respecting strange conceits in matters of faith ; although there are, it is well known, in this country, as well as in others, a few individuals who think themselves at liberty to select out of the Gospel, for their creed, just what happens to suit their particular humour or caprice, and to reject all the rest, and may therefore very justly be said to “ halt between two “ opinions ;” yet the number of these persons is so inconsiderable, and the reception their tenets meet with is so very unpromising, that to bestow much of our attention upon them, would be a very needless waste of time. Much less can it be necessary to enter here into any *confutation* of their fanciful opinions. They have been confuted, most effectually confuted, above seventeen hundred years ago, and that, too, by a book which is, or ought to be, in the hands of every Christian ; I mean the Bible. Every page of that sacred volume bears testimony against them ; and it is utterly impossible for any man of a plain understanding, and
of

of an unprejudiced mind, to look into the Gospel without perceiving, that all those great and important doctrines, which our philosophic Christians are pleased to reject (and which, in fact, amount to almost every peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, except that of the resurrection) are taught and repeatedly inculcated in the sacred writings, in terms as clear, explicit, and unequivocal, as it is in the power of language to express. They are, in fact, so interwoven with the very frame and constitution, with the entire substance and essence of Christianity, that they must stand or fall together. They are found in the same Gospel, and are intimately blended and incorporated with those moral precepts, and those evidences of a resurrection and a future state, which are on all sides allowed to be divine; and there is no such thing as separating them from each other, no such thing as dissolving the connection between them, without undermining the whole fabric of Christianity, and defeating the chief purposes for which Christ came into the world.

Let no one, then, that professes himself a disciple of Christ, ever be induced to fluctuate thus between two systems. Let him never listen to any such deceitful terms of accommodation

commodation with "the vain philosophy of
"this world," nor suffer himself to be led
away by "the delusions of science, falsely so
"called." Let him never consent to maim
and mutilate that complete and perfect body
of Christian doctrine, which "is so fitly
"framed together, and compacted by that
"which every joint supplieth," that to take
away any one member, is to destroy the beauty,
strength, and stability of the whole.

Thus much may suffice at present for those
who, in the language of the text, may be said
to halt between *two opinions*, between the Re-
ligion of nature and the Religion of Christ. I
now hasten to that which is the principal
object of this discourse, the *practical* incon-
sistencies with which some men are chargeable.
For, among the professors of our faith, there
are too many who, though their speculative
opinions may be right and uniform, yet in their
practice halt between two opposite modes of
conduct, and endeavour to serve at the same
time two masters, God and Mammon.

I say nothing here of those who are pro-
fessedly men of the world, who disclaim all
belief in the doctrines of the Gospel, and
all obedience to its laws. These men have
taken

taken their part, have adopted a system. A miserable one, indeed, it is; but it is, however, a decided one; and whatever other guilt they may be chargeable with, *inconsistence* certainly is not one of their faults.

In this respect the children of this world are in their generation commonly wiser than the children of light, among whom, unfortunately, the same undeviating uniformity of conduct is not often to be found. Of those who acknowledge Christ to be their lord and master, how few are there that adhere to him invariably throughout, without ever revolting from their allegiance, and devoting themselves to another sovereign, "the prince of this world!"

One man finding it said in Scripture, that charity shall cover a multitude of sins, without ever once giving himself the trouble to examine into the true meaning of that doubtful expression, takes refuge under the letter of it, and on the strength of a little ostentatious generosity, indulges every irregular passion without controul, and fancies himself all the while a serious, sober Christian.

A second, rather shocked at this, keeps clear of all gross and flagrant enormities; but
 hopes

hopes that a few secret and less presumptuous sins will be easily forgiven him.

A third, still more modest and more scrupulous, contents himself with one favourite vice, and makes not the least doubt but that his exact observance of the divine law, in other respects, will amply atone for his failure in this single instance.

A fourth advances one step further than this; he indulges himself in no gratification that seems to deserve the name of sin; but, at the same time, allows the gaieties, the amusement, the business or the cares of life, to take entire possession of his soul, to shut out, in a great measure, all thoughts of God and Religion, and steal away his affections from Heaven and heavenly things.

Lastly; there is another class of men who are irreproachable in their morals, and sufficiently temperate, perhaps, in their pursuits of business or of amusement, but yet fall short of that steady and affectionate attachment to their divine Master, which his Religion inculcates, and his kindness demands. They want that zeal and fervour, that earnestness and activity in his service, that absolute resignation to his will,

will, that perfect confidence in his infinite wisdom and goodness, that freedom from all immoderate anxiety and solicitude, hope or fear, exultation or disappointment respecting the various events of the present life, which are the surest and most unequivocal proofs, that this world has little or no share in our affections, but that our treasure is in Heaven, and there is our heart also.

Thus it is, that too many in almost every denomination of professed Christians do, in one way or another, in a greater or a less degree, "halt between two opposite rules of life," divide their attention between the commands of Christ, and the criminal, or the trifling enjoyments of the present scene, endeavour to accommodate matters as commodiously as possible, between things temporal and things eternal; and to take as much as they can of this world, without losing their hold on the rewards of the next. But let no man impose on himself with these delusive imaginations. Such duplicity of conduct is as evidently contrary both to the letter and the spirit of Christ's Religion, and as justly obnoxious to the reproof conveyed in the text, as the fault already

touched upon of "halting between two opinions." Whoever looks into the Gospel, with the least degree of attention, must see, that it requires us to give up our whole soul to God, and pay an unreserved and undivided obedience to all his commands. The language of Christianity to its disciples is like that of Solomon in his Proverbs, "my son give me thy heart*." We are commanded "to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth: to have our conversation in Heaven; to love God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; to take up our cross and follow Christ; to leave father, mother, brethren, sisters, houses and lands, for his name's sake, and the Gospel's†." These, and such like expressions, are, it is well known, perpetually occurring in the sacred writings. And although we are not to understand them so literally, and so rigorously, as to conceive ourselves obliged to renounce the world absolutely, and all its rational and innocent enjoyments, to retire into deserts and

* Prov. xxiii. 26.

† Col. iii. 2. Ph'l. iii. 20. Mark xii. 30. Matth. xvi. 24. xix. 29.

caves,

caves, and think of nothing but the concerns of eternity; yet, if we allow these phrases *any* meaning, they cannot imply less than this; that our chief and principal concern, beyond all comparison, must be to please and obey our Maker in all things; that we must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; that we must look up to his law as the great guide and governing principle of our lives; that we must not vibrate perpetually between two masters, between two opposite modes of conduct, between vice and virtue, between piety and pleasure, between inclination and duty, between this life and the next; but devote ourselves heartily and sincerely to the service of our heavenly Father, and suffer no one earthly object to estrange or draw away our affections from him.

The only way, then, for a wise and a good man to take, is to preserve that uniformity and consistence, and dignity of character, both in opinion and in practice, which is in all cases respectable; in the Christian Religion essential and indispensable. You must, in short, as Joshua said to the Jewish people, "you must chuse, this day, whom you will serve." You must

must take your part, and adhere to it steadily and invariably throughout.

If, in the first place, with respect to doctrines and matters of belief, you think that you are innocent and perfect creatures, that you stand in need of no Redeemer, no Mediator, no expiation for your past, no assistance for your future conduct; that revelation is needless, and reason alone sufficient for all the good purposes of this life and the next, then follow reason, and be consistent with yourselves. Do not repose the least part of your hopes on Christ. You have nothing to do with him or his Gospel. You can claim nothing under his name; by your own merits you must stand or fall; must go boldly and with confidence up to the throne of God, and demand from his justice, as a matter of right, that pardon and those rewards which you disdain to receive from his mercy as a matter of grace. But if your minds revolt against such presumption as this; if you feel yourselves corrupt and sinful, the children of vanity and the sport of passions, continually transgressing the dictates even of your own reason, and of course continually deserving punishment from the
Giver

Giver of that reason; if you find that something more than mere modern philosophy is necessary to heal the depravity of your nature, to reconcile you to an offended God, to assist you in the performance of your duty, to support you under the severest afflictions, and to satisfy the cravings of your soul with that fulness of joy which the world, and all the world's wisdom, can never give; if, in fine, you perceive that the Gospel of Christ contains every thing you want, and that the truth of its pretensions is founded on such sort of evidence as no man upon earth was ever yet deceived by trusting to in any other case, then follow Christ; take him for your only guide in religious knowledge, and repose an entire and absolute confidence in his holy word. When once you are persuaded that he is an inspired teacher, and that he and his Religion came from God, no doctrines, however difficult or mysterious, how much soever they transcend reason, if not repugnant to it, will be any obstacles in your way. You will receive them all with implicit reverence and submission, on the sole ground of his testimony. The only question to be asked re-

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specting such doctrines is this: Do they actually exist in the Gospel? Is there sufficient evidence for the authenticity of that Gospel? If there be, and this we have all along supposed, the dispute is decided, and you can no longer hesitate respecting the admission of truths grounded on such authority.

In the same manner, with respect to *practice*. If you admit the reality of a future existence, and a future day of recompence, and if after deliberately comparing this life with the next, you do, in your best and soberest judgment, think that present enjoyments are more valuable than future and eternal happiness, and a little self-denial in this world more insupportable than everlasting misery in the next, then let this world be the sole idol of your hearts; to this devote yourselves without reserve. It would then be folly to sacrifice any pleasures, any advantages to the commands of your Maker, or to let one thought about futurity disturb your tranquillity, or interrupt your pursuits.

But if you find this to be impossible; if you feel yourselves to be designed for immortality; if you cannot forbear looking perpetually forward into futurity; if to these sentiments of

Nature, Reason adds her voice, and Revelation confirms it by evidence that is irresistible ; if, moreover, on a fair estimate of the respective value of things temporal, and things eternal, you are convinced that the pains and the pleasures of this world are not worthy to be compared with the rewards and punishments of the next ; if, in fine, the limited nature of the human faculties, the contrary tempers of mind, and courses of action, which contrary pursuits require, and the express declarations of Christ himself, prove incontestably that we cannot serve God and Mammon, cannot reconcile two opposite modes of conduct together ; what, then, is the course which a prudent and considerate man has to take ? Why, evidently, to devote himself absolutely and entirely to the service of his one Lord and Master, and to suffer nothing to interfere with that great object of his attention. If there really *is* a future scene of existence, and if the rewards promised to the righteous, and the punishments denounced against the wicked, are as great and as durable as they are represented to be, there is no sacrifice in this life which a wise man would not make to them. If they

are worth any thing, they are worth every thing. Be, then, not only almost, but altogether Christians. Let no enticing words of man's wisdom put you out of conceit with the divine truths of the Gospel, and make you halt between two opinions; let no one favourite vice, no worldly pursuits, no vain amusements, draw you off from any part of your duty, and divide your obedience between God and Baal. If you have chosen the other world for your portion, cling not any longer fondly to this; if you have set your hand to the plough, look not back to the vanities you have renounced. Be not irresolute, wavering, and indecisive; be not governed by the opinion of the day, nor the temptation of the moment. Do not so divide yourselves between two masters, as to please neither the one nor the other; do not manage so wretchedly as to lose at once what little this world has to give, and all the glorious rewards which the other holds up to your view. "Chuse ye, in short, this day, whom ye will serve." If the Lord be God, and not Baal, be resolved at once; take a manly and a decided part; fix your affections immoveably on heavenly things; pursue, with unremitting

unremitting attention, your best and truest interest; give up yourselves, body and soul, into the hands of your Maker, and persevere uniformly in his service to the end of your lives; that having thus finished your course, and kept the faith to the last, you may receive “the
“ prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus;
“ and when your flesh and your heart shall
“ fail, may find God to be the strength of your
“ heart, and your portion for ever.”

SERMON X.*

PSALM xxii. 28.

THE KINGDOM IS THE LORD'S, AND HE IS
THE GOVERNOR AMONG THE NATIONS.

THE doctrine conveyed to us in these words is that of A NATIONAL PROVIDENCE; and it is a doctrine no less consonant to reason than consolatory to the human mind. It must therefore afford us the highest satisfaction, to find this truth confirmed by the sacred writers in the clearest and the strongest terms. The Scriptures are full of the most gracious promises to righteous nations, and of the most dreadful denunciations against wicked and impenitent kingdoms; and it is well known, that neither these promises nor these threatenings were vain. The history of the Jewish people, more especially, is

* Preached before the House of Lords, January 30, 1778.

scarce any thing else than the history of God's providential interposition to punish or reward them, according as they obeyed or disobeyed his laws. And although we should admit that on account of the peculiar circumstances of that people, and the unexampled form of their theocratic government, their case cannot be drawn into a parallel with that of other nations, yet there are not wanting some which may. Those four celebrated empires of antiquity which rose up one after another, and successively filled the world with astonishment and terror, were nothing more than mighty engines in the hand of God to execute his various dispensations of mercy or of justice on the Jewish nation, and other civil communities; and to prepare the way gradually for the introduction of another kingdom of a very different nature, and superior to them all. Their rise and fall were predicted in the sacred writings long before they existed*, and those extraordinary personages, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus, were, though unknown to themselves, the AGENTS of the Almighty,

* Daniel vii. and viii.

raised up at certain appointed times, and furnished with every requisite qualification to “perform all his pleasure *,” and fulfil his views. “I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the lyars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil: I THE LORD DO ALL THESE THINGS †.” Thus we see, that what is considered as the common vicissitude of human affairs, peace and war, pestilence and famine, political changes and national revolutions, the passions of the wicked, the machinations of the crafty, the virtues of the good, the errors of the weak, the prudence of the wise, the shining qualities of the great; every thing, in short, that the world calls accident, chance and fortune, are all, in fact, under the control of an invisible and over-ruling hand; which, without any violation of the laws of

* Isaiah xliv. 28.

† Isaiah xliv. 24, 25, 26; and xlv. 7.

nature, or the freedom of human actions, renders them subservient to the gracious purposes of divine wisdom in the government of the world.

In the instance above adduced of the four great monarchies, we see this sublime truth exemplified in the most striking manner. They form, as it were, one vast map of providential administration, delineated on so large a scale, and marked with such legible characters, that they cannot well escape our notice. But although this is very properly hung up for the observation of mankind in general, yet there are other examples of a national Providence which to us may be more interesting, as coming more home to ourselves. We of this kingdom have been most remarkably favoured with the visible protection of Heaven; and there are in our own history so many plain and unequivocal marks of a divine interference, that if we do not acknowledge it, we are either the blindest or the most ungrateful people on earth. Let me more particularly call your attention to the following very singular circumstances, in some of the greatest events that dignify the annals of this country.

Our

Our separation from the church of Rome was begun by the passions of a prince, who meant nothing less than that reformation of Religion which was the consequence of it. The total dispersion and overthrow of what was profanely called the invincible Armada, was effected almost entirely by winds and tempests. That dreadful popish conspiracy, which seemed guarded by impenetrable darkness and silence against all possibility of detection, was at last casually discovered by a letter equally indiscreet and obscure. At a time when there appeared no hope of ever recovering our ancient form of government, it suddenly rose from the ruins in which the tragedy of this day had involved it; under the auspices of a man who had helped to destroy it, and who seemed almost to the last moment undecided whether he should restore or destroy it again. And to crown all, our deliverance in a subsequent reign from the attempts of a gloomy tyrant to enslave both body and soul, was brought about by a concurrence of the most surprizing incidents co-operating, at that very critical moment on which the whole depended, with the noblest efforts of true patriotism.

Let

Let now the hardiest sceptic consider only these few remarkable facts, selected from a multitude of others scarce less extraordinary, and then let him deny, if he can, the evident traces they bear stamped upon them of SOME SUPERIOR POWER.

It may seem, indeed, as if the very times to which the present solemnity carries back our thoughts, were a contradiction to the doctrine here advanced, were a strong and melancholy proof that God's providential care was then at least withdrawn, and "the light of his countenance turned away" from this island. The murder of a virtuous though misguided prince, and the total subversion of the constitution, may be thought utterly inconsistent with the notion of a divine superintendence. But it is not surely to be expected, that throughout the whole duration of a great empire, any more than throughout the whole life of an individual, there is to be one uninterrupted course of prosperity and success. Admonitions and checks, corrections and punishments, may be, and undoubtedly are, in both cases sometimes useful, perhaps essentially necessary; and the care and even kindness of Providence may be

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no less visible in these salutary severities, than in the distribution of its most valuable blessings.

Both private and public afflictions have a natural tendency to awaken, to alarm, to instruct, to humanize, to meliorate the heart of man; and they may be ultimately attended with other very important and beneficial consequences. This was eminently the case in that turbulent period we are now commemorating. The convulsions into which the nation was then thrown, seem to have been the efforts of a vigorous though at that time disordered constitution; which shaking off in those violent agitations some of its most malignant humours, acquired in the end a degree of health and soundness unknown to it before. These however might, by a skilful management, have been much sooner established. The lenient remedies of LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY, which were at first applied, had made so great a progress in subduing the maladies of the state, that there was all the encouragement in the world to persevere in that regular and prudent course. But most unfortunately for the nation, it was too hastily relinquished; and in an evil hour re-

course was had to that most dangerous and desperate of all experiments, which nothing but extreme necessity can justify, **MILITARY FORCE.**

They who set out with the very best principles, and the purest intentions, were insensibly led by a few artful incendiaries into excesses of which at one time they would have thought themselves utterly incapable. In their haste to reform every thing, they unhappily forgot that the other two branches of the legislature, **THE KING AND THE LORDS**, had rights as sacred and as essential to the public welfare, as those of the **COMMONS**; and that it was no less injurious and dangerous to violate the constitution, for the sake of advancing the power of the people, than for the purpose of extending the prerogative of the crown. Heated with those visionary plans which they had formed of absolute perfection in church and state, they thought it allowable to promote such righteous ends by the most unrighteous means; by trampling on all those sacred laws of truth, justice, equity, charity, and humanity, which were undoubtedly meant (however little we may regard that meaning) to govern
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our *political* as well as *private* conduct: and which can never be transgressed, not even in pursuit of liberty itself, without the most pernicious effects.

No wonder, then, that these effects followed in the present instance, and that the Almighty pursued such unchristian practices with the most exemplary vengeance. It is, indeed, very remarkable, that every one of those parties which bore a share in this miserable contest, king, nobles, commons, puritans, and patriots, were disappointed of their aim, and found every thing fall out the very reverse of what they expected. Each in their turn became the victim of their own devices; and the new race, which sprung up from their dregs, exhibited to the world a most singular but at the same time most instructive spectacle. Instead of that unlimited freedom, temporal and spiritual, which they conceived themselves commissioned by Heaven to establish; confusion and bloodshed, tyranny and anarchy, every folly and every extravagance which enthusiasm could engender, followed each other in quick succession. Ashamed and tired of such disgraceful and capricious insults, the nation was
at

at length roused, and with one voice recalled the exiled monarch to the throne. But as if it was meant by Providence that every part of this unexampled scene should hold forth some useful lesson to mankind, it appeared from the conclusion no less than from the whole progress of it, how completely all immoderate vehemence of temper and conduct defeats its own purposes, and by grasping at too much loses every thing. For, as one extreme naturally begets another, excessive rigour to the father produced excessive indulgence to the son; and in one fond moment of joy was lost the fruit of all the preceding struggles against the exorbitant claims and encroachments of the crown.

But when, in the following reign, a different conduct was observed, the event was also different, and Heaven gave its sanction to the glorious work. At that memorable period all the injustice and oppression was on the part of the sovereign, all the forbearance and moderation on the part of the subject. For although the invasions made both on our civil and religious rights, by James the Second, were far bolder and more alarming than those attempted

ed by his unhappy father, yet they produced no hasty, no licentious excesses among the people. Every legal, every constitutional mode of redress was first tried, and when those failed of success, more vigorous and efficacious measures became necessary. Yet even these were conducted with the most consummate prudence and circumspection; and the wisdom, the calmness, the firmness, the temper, the sobriety, with which our illustrious ancestors proceeded on that occasion, form a most striking contrast to the rashness, the passion, the wild impetuosity, the fanatic fury, with which Cromwell and his associates set themselves to tear up the abuses of government, and government itself along with them, by the roots. The great authors of THE REVOLUTION, on the contrary, disdaining all the usual artifices of faction to inflame and mislead the multitude, and leaving every one to his own natural sense and feeling of the injuries he sustained; without calumny or falsehood, without invective or misrepresentation, without the horrors of a civil war, without a single battle, almost without the loss of a single life, effected every thing they wished. Because both the end they pursued, and the means they employed,

were reasonable and just, Providence crowned their efforts with success, and gave them the glory of establishing the rights of the people, not on the ruins of the constitution, but on the nice adjustment and exact counterpoise of all its several component parts.

We have then the strongest reasons to conclude, that there is a Power on high which watches over the fate of nations, and which has in a more especial manner, in a manner plainly distinguishable from the ordinary course of events, and the common effects of human policy and foresight, preserved this kingdom in the most critical and perilous circumstances*. Does not this then afford some ground to hope, that if we endeavour to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will be once

* "I have often observed, (says an eloquent writer) that
 "when the fulness and maturity of time is come that produces
 "the greater convulsions and changes in the world, it usually
 "pleases God to make it appear, by the *manner* of them, that
 "they are not the effects of human force or policy, but of the
 "divine justice and predestination. And though we see a man
 "striking as it were the hour of that fulness of time, yet our rea-
 "son must needs be convinced, that his hand is moved by some
 "secret, and, to us who stand without, invisible direction."
Cowley's Discourse on the Government of Oliver Cromwell.

This observation is, I apprehend, strictly applicable to those instances of INVISIBLE DIRECTION which have been here produced.

more

more extended to us; and that by a speedy and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove or lighten those heavy judgments which our iniquities have now most justly drawn down upon us. This, I know, is holding a language which they who compliment themselves with the name of PHILOSOPHERS will treat with sovereign contempt. But let them enjoy their triumph; and let them allow us, who think Christianity the best philosophy, to console ourselves, amidst the gloom that at present surrounds us, with those reviving hopes which the belief of God's providential government presents to us*. If this be superstition, it is so delightful a superstition, that it would be inhuman to deprive us of it. But we *know* in whom we trust; we know that this trust rests on a foundation which cannot be shaken. It rests, as we have seen, not only on the express declarations and promises of holy writ, but on the many remarkable instances of a supernatural agency which occur in the history of mankind, and above all in our own. In

* We may, I trust, on the same grounds entertain even now the same reviving hopes. Indeed much of the reasoning made use of in this discourse applies most remarkably to the present circumstances of this country.

every one of the extraordinary national deliverances above-mentioned, the dangers that threatened this island were of a much greater magnitude, and more formidable aspect, than those which now seem to alarm us. Why, then, may we not again indulge ourselves with the same expectations? A series of past favours naturally begets a presumption of their continuance; and it must not be wholly imputed to the laudable partiality which every honest man entertains for his own country, if we give way to a persuasion, that God will still vouchsafe his accustomed goodness to this favoured land. Yes, we *will* sooth ourselves with the belief, that a nation so distinguished as this has been with happier revolutions, and greater blessings, than any other ever experienced, will not be at this time deserted by its gracious Benefactor and Protector. It is here that civil liberty has fixed her throne; it is here that protestantism finds its firmest support; it is here that the divine principle of toleration is established; it is here that a provision is made by government for the poor; it is here that they are with a boundless munificence relieved both by private charity and public.

public institutions; it is here, in fine, that the laws are equal, wise, and good; that they are administered by men of acknowledged ability, and unimpeached integrity; and that through their hands the stream of justice flows with a purity unknown in any other age or nation. Nor have we only the happiness of enjoying these unspeakable advantages ourselves; we have had the glory (a glory superior to all conquests, to all triumphs) of diffusing a large proportion of them over the remotest regions of the globe. Wherever our discoveries, our commerce, or our arms have penetrated, they have in general carried the laws, the freedom, and the religion, of this country along with them. Whatever faults and errors we may be chargeable with in other respects, for these gifts at least, the most invaluable that one country can bestow upon another, it is not improbable that both the eastern and the western world may one day acknowledge that they were *originally* indebted to this kingdom. Is it then a vain, is it a delusive imagination, that after having been made the chosen instruments of Providence for such noble, such beneficial purposes, there is some degree of felicity still

in reserve for us, and that the illustrious part we have been appointed to act on the great theatre of the world is not yet accomplished? What may be in the councils of THE MOST HIGH; *what mighty changes* he may be now meditating in the system of human affairs, he alone can tell *. But in the midst of this awful suspense, while the fate of empires hangs trembling on his resolves, of one thing at least we are absolutely certain; that it is better to have him for our friend than our enemy. Which of the two he shall be, depends entirely upon ourselves. If by our infidelity, our impiety, our libertinism, our ill-timed gaiety and wanton profuseness in the very face of public distress, we audaciously insult his admonitions, and brave his utmost vengeance; what else can we expect but that every thing which ought naturally to be the means of our stability, will be converted into instruments of our destruction? That immense dominion, of which we shall then be no longer worthy, will be gradually rent away from us; and it may even

* *What mighty changes* in the system of human affairs have since this period (1778) actually taken place both in America and in Europe, the reader need not be informed.

become

become necessary for the welfare of mankind, to cut off our communication with distant countries, lest they be infected with the contagion of our sins. But if, on the contrary, by reverencing the judgments of God, and returning to that allegiance which we owe him, we again put ourselves under his protection; he may still, as he has often done, dispel the clouds that hang over us: or if, for wise reasons, he suffer them to gather and darken upon us; he may make even this, in the final result, conduce to our real welfare.

There is, in fact, no calamity, private or public, which, under his gracious direction, may not eventually prove a blessing. There are no losses, but that of his favour, which ought to sink us into despair. There is a spirit in freedom, there is an energy in virtue, there is a confidence in Religion, which will enable those that possess them, and those only, to rise superior to every disaster. It is not a boundless extent of territory, nor even of commerce, that is essential to public prosperity. They are necessary, indeed, to national greatness, but not to national felicity. The true wealth, the true security of a kingdom, consists in frugality, industry,

dustry, temperance, fortitude, probity, piety, unanimity. Great difficulties, more especially, call for great talents and great virtues. It is in times such as these that we look for those noble examples of SELF-DENIAL and PUBLIC SPIRIT, which bespeak true greatness of mind, which have sometimes saved kingdoms, and immortalized individuals. Let, then, all the wise and the good in every party and denomination of men among us (for they are in every one to be found) stand forth in the present exigency as one man, to advise, direct, assist, and befriend their country; and as the Roman triumvirs gave up each his friend for the *destruction* of the state, let every one now give up his favourite prejudices, systems, interest, resentments, and connections, for the *preservation* of it. Let us not, for God's sake, let us not waste that time in tearing and devouring one another, which ought to be employed in providing for the general welfare. Unjust suspicions, uncandid interpretations, mutual reproaches, and endless altercations, can answer no other purpose but to embitter our minds, and multiply the very evils we all wish to remove. From beginnings such as these arose
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the calamities we are now met to deplore ; and the conclusion was, not liberty, but tyranny in the extreme. Can there possibly be a stronger motive for us to moderate our dissensions, and compose our passions, before they grow too big for us to manage and control? On the same bottom are we all embarked, and if, in the midst of our angry contentions, the vessel perish, we must all perish with it. It is therefore our common interest, as it is our common duty, to unite in guarding against so fatal an event. There can be no danger of it but from ourselves. Our worst, our most formidable enemies, are our own personal vices and political distractions. Let harmony inspire our councils, and Religion sanctify our hearts, and we have nothing to fear. PEACE ABROAD is undoubtedly a most desirable object. But there are two things still more so, PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER, and PEACE WITH GOD.

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S E R M O N XI.

LUKE iv. 32.

AND THEY WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS
DOCTRINE, FOR HIS WORD WAS WITH
POWER.

IT is evident from this, and many other
similar passages of the New Testament,
that our blessed Lord's discourses made a very
uncommon and wonderful impression on the
minds of his hearers. We are told, in various
places, "that the common people heard him
gladly; that they wondered at the gracious
words which proceeded out of his mouth,
and declared, with one voice, that never man
spake like this man *." Expressions of this
sort, which continually occur in relation to our
Saviour's preaching, we never find applied in

* Mark xii. 37. Luke iv. 22. John vii. 29.

Scripture to any other teacher of Religion ; neither to the prophets who preceded, nor to the apostles that followed him. And we may be sure, that the effects of his doctrine must have been very extraordinary indeed, when it could draw such strong language as this from the Evangelists, who, in general, express themselves with much calmness and simplicity ; and frequently describe the most astonishing miracles, and deliver the sublimest doctrines, without any apparent emotion, or remarkable energy of diction.

What, then, could it be which gave such surprizing force to our Saviour's instructions, such power to his words ? He employed none of those rhetorical artifices and contrivances, those bold figures and unexpected strokes of overbearing eloquence, which the most celebrated *worldly* orators have generally made use of, to inflame the passions and gain the admiration of the multitude. These, certainly, were not the instruments employed by our Saviour to command attention. The causes of these surprizing effects which his preaching produced, were of a very different nature.

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Some of these I shall endeavour to enumerate and illustrate as concisely, as I can.

1. The first was, the infinite importance and dignity of the subjects he discoursed upon. He did not, like many ancient and many modern philosophers, consume his own time, and that of his hearers, with idle, fruitless speculations, with ingenious essays, and elaborate disquisitions on matters of no real use or moment, with scholastic distinctions, and unintelligible refinements; nor did he, like the Jewish rabbins, content himself with dealing out ceremonies and traditions, with discoursing on mint and cummin, and estimating the breadth of a phylactery; but he drew off the attention of his followers from these trivial, contemptible things, to the greatest and noblest objects that could engage the notice, or interest the heart of man.

He taught, in the first place, the existence of one Supreme Almighty Being, the creator, preserver, and governor of the universe. To this great Being he taught men how to pray, to worship him in spirit and in truth, in holiness and purity of life. He laid open all the depravity of human nature; he pointed out
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the only effectual remedy for it; belief in himself, the way, the truth, and the life; repentance and amendment; an entire and absolute renovation of heart, and unreserved submission to the will and the law of God.

The morality he taught was the purest, the soundest, the sublimest, the most rational, the most perfect, that had ever before entered into the imagination, or proceeded from the lips of man. And the uniform tendency of all his doctrines, and all his precepts, was to make the whole human race virtuous and happy; to compose them into resignation and content; to inspire them with sentiments of justice, equity, mildness, moderation, compassion, and affection towards each other; and to fill them with sure hope and trust in God for pardon of their sins, on most equitable terms, and the assistance of his holy spirit to regulate their future conduct.

And, finally, to give irresistible force to his commands, he added the most awful sanctions, the doctrines of a future resurrection, a day of judgment and of retribution, a promise of eternal rewards to the good, and a denunciation

of

of the most tremendous punishments to the wicked.

2. Such was the general *matter* of his instructions ; and, in the next place, his *manner* of conveying them was no less excellent, and no less conducive to their success.

What, for instance, could be more noble, more affecting, than the very first opening of his divine commission? “The spirit of the
“ Lord is upon me ; because he hath anointed
“ me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he
“ hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to
“ preach deliverance to the captives, and re-
“ covering of sight to the blind, to set at li-
“ berty them that are bruised, to preach the
“ acceptable year of the Lord*.”

These were the gracious declarations with which he began his ministry, and in the same spirit he continued it to the very last. Though he invited all men, without distinction, high and low, rich and poor, to embrace the gracious offers of salvation ; yet he addressed himself principally to the ignorant, the indigent, the publican, and the sinner. “ He broke not
“ the bruised reed, nor quenched the smok-

* Luke iv. 18.

“ing flax†;” that is, he bore not hard on any that were bowed down with a sense of their unworthiness, nor extinguished by discouragement the faintest spark of returning virtue; but, on the contrary, invited to him those “that were heavy laden with sin, that he might give them rest.”

His discourses were perfectly adapted to these gracious purposes. They were mild, tender, encouraging. They were such as the most learned and best informed might listen to with benefit and delight, yet such as the weakest and most ignorant might easily comprehend. He did not deliver a regular, dry, methodical system of ethics, nor did he enter into all the little minute divisions and subdivisions of virtue. But he laid down, in the first place, the two great leading fundamental principles of love to God, and love to mankind, and thence deduced, as occasions presented themselves, and incidents occurred, which gave peculiar force and energy to his instructions, all the principal duties respecting God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Whenever he made use of the common didactic method, as in his dis-

† Matth. xii. 20.

course from the mount, the doctrines he taught, and the precepts he delivered, were short, sententious, solemn, important, full of wisdom and of dignity, yet intelligible and clear. But sensible how much this formal mode of teaching was apt to weary the attention, and die away out of the memory, he added two others, much better calculated to make deep and lasting impressions on the mind. The first was, conveying his instructions under the cover of similitudes and parables, drawn from the most obvious appearances of nature, or the most familiar occurrences of life. The other was the use of certain significant emblematic actions, such as that of washing his disciples feet, by which he expressed his meaning more clearly and emphatically than by any words he could have employed for that purpose.

3. Another circumstance which gave force and efficacy to our Saviour's preaching was, that he appeared to be perfectly *impartial*, and to have no respect to persons. He reprov'd vice in every station, wherever he found it, with the same freedom and boldness. He paid no court either to the multitude on the one hand, or to the great and wealthy on the

other. Though he ate and drank, and conversed with publicans and sinners, yet it was not to encourage and indulge them in their vices, but to reprove and correct them; it was because they were sick, and wanted a physician, and that physician he was. In the same manner, while he taught the people to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, to honour those to whom honour was due, and to pay all proper respect and obedience to those who sat in Moses' seat, yet this did not prevent him from rebuking the Elders and the Rulers, the Scribes and the Pharisees, with the greatest plainness, and with the utmost severity, for their hypocrisy and insincerity, their rapacity and extortion, their zeal for trifles, and their neglect of the weightier matters of the law. This intrepidity and impartiality in his instructions, and in the distribution of his censures and his admonitions, evidently shewed that he had no private ends to serve, that the salvation of men was his *only* object, and that he was not to be deterred from pursuing it by the fear of consequences. All which could not fail to impress his followers with

with the utmost respect, awe, and reverence, both for his person and his doctrines.

4. Every one that hopes to work any material change, any effectual reformation in the hearts of those whom he addresses, must endeavour to find out, as well as he is able, their real sentiments and habits of thinking, their tempers and dispositions, their peculiar failings and infirmities, their secret wickednesses, and unwitnessed transgressions.

There are a thousand artifices by which men are able to conceal their corruption and depravity from the eyes of others, and sometimes, alas! even from their own. And it has been affirmed by some very sagacious observers of human nature, that no one ever yet discovered the bottom of his heart, even to his most intimate and bosom friend. But it was impossible for any wickedness, however secret, or however artfully disguised, to escape the all-seeing eye of the Son of God. He saw, at one glance, the inmost recesses of the soul. He discovered every thought as it rose in the mind. He detected every irregular desire before it ripened into action. Hence he was always enabled to adapt his discourses to

the particular circumstances and situation of every individual that heard him, and to apply such remedies, and give such directions, as the peculiar exigences of their case required. Hence, too, his answers to their questions and enquiries were frequently accommodated more to what they thought, than what they said; and we find them going away from him astonished, at perceiving that he was perfectly well acquainted with every thing that passed within their breasts; and filled with admiration of a teacher possessed of such extraordinary powers, to whom all hearts were open, and from whom no secrets were hid. It is evident what a command this must give him over the affections of his hearers, and what attention and obedience it must secure to all his precepts and exhortations.

5. The same effects must, in some degree, be produced by the various proofs he gave of the most perfect wisdom in solving the difficulties that were proposed to him, and of the most consummate prudence and address, in escaping all the snares that were laid for him. Even when he was but twelve years of age, he was able to converse and to dispute with
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the most learned expounders of the law, and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers. Afterwards, during the whole course of his ministry, the Rulers, and Scribes, and Pharisees, that is, the men of the greatest learning and ability amongst the Jews, were perpetually endeavouring to entangle him in his talk, to perplex and harrafs him with insidious questions, and to draw him into absurd conclusions, and hazardous situations. But he constantly found means to disengage himself both from the dilemma and the danger; to form his determinations with such exquisite sagacity and judgment, and sometimes to propose to them, in his turn, difficulties so much beyond their ingenuity to clear up, that they generally “ marvelled, and left him, and went their way. “ Not one amongst them was able to answer him; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask him any more questions.”

6. It is evident to reason, and it is confirmed by invariable experience, that the purest and the sublimest precepts, if not enforced by a correspondent example in the teacher, will avail but little with the generality of mankind.

It is equally certain, that there scarce ever existed a public instructor, whose practice, however laudable in general, did not fall far below the rules he prescribed to others, and to himself. *

Here our blessed Lord stood unrivalled and alone: he, and he only, of all the sons of men, acted up in every the minutest instance to what he taught; and exhibited, in his own person, a perfect model of every virtue he inculcated. He commanded, for instance, his disciples "to love God with all their heart, and soul, "and mind, and strength*;" and in conformity to this law, he himself manifested, through his whole conduct, the most ardent love for his heavenly Father, the most fervent zeal for his honour and glory, for the advancement of his Religion, and the establishment of his kingdom throughout the earth. His meat and drink, indeed, was to do the will of him that sent him. He commanded them again "to love their neighbour as themselves†;" and his own life was one continued exercise of love, kindness, and compassion to the whole human race. He required them to be meek, humble,

* Mark xii. 30.

† Matth. xix. 19.

gentle,

gentle, and peaceable to all men*. And how did he teach them this important lesson? "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls †." He exacted of them the most unblemished purity and sanctity of manners; a severe demand! but he had a right to make it; for he himself was "pure, holy, harmless, and undefiled: he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ‡." He enjoined them to "deny themselves and take up their cross §." But it was to follow *him* who had denied himself almost every comfort and convenience of life; and for the joy that was set before him, "endured the cross, and despised the shame" of an ignominious death ¶. He required them "to love their enemies, to bless them that cursed them, and pray for those that despitefully used and persecuted them ¶." A hard saying this, and, of all others, perhaps, the most revolting to human nature. But how could they refuse to give even this last and most painful proof of their obedience, who saw that their divine Master, when he was re-

* Tit. iii. 2. † Matth. xi. 29. ‡ Heb. vii. 26. 1 Pet. ii. 22.

§ Matth. xvi. 24. § Heb. xii. 2. ¶ Matth. v. 44.

viled, reviled not again; but, in the very midst of his agony, prayed for his enemies and persecutors*.

No wonder that every word from such a teacher as this should sink deep into the hearts of all who heard him, and engage their affections, as well as convince their understandings.

7, and lastly. To the influence of example, he added the authority of A DIVINE TEACHER.

The best and wisest of the ancient philosophers could do nothing more than give *good advice* to their followers; and we all know, from sad experience, what mere advice will do against strong passions, established habits, and inveterate corruptions.

But our great Lawgiver, on the contrary, delivered all his doctrines, and all his precepts, in the name of GOD. He spoke in a tone of superiority and command, which no one before him had the courage or the right to assume.

He called himself the SON OF GOD; and he constantly supported, in his words as well as in his actions, the dignity and the divinity

* 1 Pet. ii. 23. Luke xxiii. 34.

of that high character. Not to mention all his astonishing miracles, he showed even in his discourses, that “all power in Heaven and in
“earth was given unto him, and that he and
“his Father were one*.” In the very beginning of his sermon on the mount, to the poor in spirit, to the merciful, to the pure in heart, to the peace-makers, and many other descriptions of men, he took upon him to *promise* the kingdom of Heaven†. When he was exposing the vain traditions of the elders, he opposed to their feeble reasonings, and miserable casuistry, his own authoritative edict. “But *I* say unto you, swear not at all; *I* say
“unto you, resist not evil; *I* say unto you, love
“your enemies‡.” When the Pharisees rebuked his disciples for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath, he silenced them with declaring, “that the Son of Man was Lord
“also of the Sabbath||.” When he healed diseases, his language was, “I will, be thou
“clean§.” When he forgave sins, “be of
“good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee. Thy
“faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace

* Matth. xxviii. 18. John x. 30. † Matth. v. 3. 12.

‡ Matth. v. 34, 39, 44. || Mark ii. 28. § Matth. viii. 3.

“and sin no more *” And when he gives a description of the last day, he represents himself as an Almighty Sovereign, sitting on the throne of his glory, with all the inhabitants of the earth standing before him, to whom he distributes everlasting rewards and everlasting punishments, according to their deserts †. Well, then, might they say of him, that his “word was with power, and that he taught “them as one having authority, and not as “the Scribes ‡.”

These, then, were the principal causes which gave such force and success to our Saviour’s instruction, and compelled even his enemies to acknowledge, that “never man “spake as he spake.” The consequence was “that all men sought him,” and all who heard him, and were not blinded by their prejudices, “forsook their sins, and followed “him ||.” It is evidently *our* duty to do the same; for the same causes, which gave such efficacy to our Saviour’s preaching, do in a great degree still subsist in the Gospel, and

* Matth. ix. 2. Mark v. 34. † Matth. xxv. 31.

‡ Matth. vii. 29. || Luke iv. 42. Mark. i. 18.

ought to produce the same effects. In one respect, indeed, we fall short of those who heard him. He is not personally present with us, nor has he "taught in our streets." Here it must be owned the first disciples had some advantage over us. They who had the happiness to see and to hear him, whose senses were charmed, whose hearts were subdued by the venerable mildness of his look, the gracious majesty of his gestures, the awfully pleasing sound of his voice, to whom all he had said and done, with the very manner of his saying and doing it, was occurring every moment, and continually present in reality or in imagination; these, undoubtedly, must be moved and affected to a degree of which we can hardly form any just conception. Yet still his words carry a divine power along with them, sufficient to convince every understanding, and to subdue every heart that is not hardened against conviction. We have still before our eyes, in the histories of the Evangelists, the sublime and heavenly doctrines which he delivered, the parables he uttered, the significant actions he made use of, the instructions

structions and the reproofs he gave to sinners of every denomination, the triumphs he obtained over the most artful and insidious of his enemies, the unrivalled purity and perfection of his example, the divine authority and dignity with which he spoke, the awful punishments he denounced against those who rejected, and the eternal rewards he promised to those who received his words. These things still remain, and must for ever remain; must for ever give irresistible force and energy to every word that is recorded as proceeding from the mouth of Christ, and must render it "quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit*." If eloquence, such as this, does not make a deep, and lasting, and vital impression upon our souls; if we do not find it to be, indeed, the power of God unto salvation, we shall be left without excuse. Let us, then, in the language of our church, most earnestly beseech Almighty God, that those sacred words which we have now, or at any other time, heard

* Heb. iv. 12.

with

with our outward ears, may, through his grace be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N XII.*

LUKE vii. 22.

THEN JESUS ANSWERING, SAID UNTO THEM, GO YOUR WAY, AND TELL JOHN WHAT THINGS YE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD; HOW THAT THE BLIND SEE, THE LAME WALK, THE LEPERS ARE CLEANSED, THE DEAF HEAR, THE DEAD ARE RAISED, TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED.

YOU will immediately recollect the occasion on which these words were spoken. They make a part of the answer which our Saviour gave to the two disciples whom John the Baptist sent to him, to ask whether he was the Great Deliverer that was to come, or they were to look for another. The whole passage is a remarkable one, and affords ample matter

* Preached at the Yearly Meeting of the Charity Schools, in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, May 2, 1782.

for

for observation ; but the particular circumstance to which I mean to draw your attention at present, is the last clause of the text, in which we are told, that “ to the poor the “ Gospel is preached.”

That our Lord should appeal to the miracles which he had wrought before the eyes of the two disciples, as an incontestible proof that he was the Messiah, will be thought very natural and proper ; but that he should immediately subjoin to this, as an *additional* proof ; and a proof on which he seems to lay as much stress as on the other, that to “ the poor the “ Gospel was preached,” may appear, at the first view, a little extraordinary. We shall, however, soon be satisfied that in this, as well as in every other instance, our divine Master acted with consummate wisdom. He was speaking to Jews. His object was to convince them, that he was the MESSIAH. The obvious way of doing this was to shew, that he corresponded to the description which their own prophets gave of that great personage. Now *they* speak of him as one, who should not only give eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and speech to the dumb, but

but should also "preach good tidings to the
 "meek and the poor*." These were two
 distinct and separate marks by which he was to
 be known, and it was therefore as proper and
 necessary for our Saviour to refer to the one as
 to the other. Whoever pretended to be the
 MESSIAH, must unite in himself these two
 great discriminating peculiarities, which, taken
 together, form one of the most illustrious and
 beneficent characters that can be imagined; a
 character distinguished by the communication
 of the greatest of all earthly blessings to two
 descriptions of men, who stood most in need of
 assistance, *the diseased, and the poor*. To the
 former, the promised Saviour of the world was
 to give *health*; to the latter, *spiritual instruction*.
 In this manner was the great Redeemer mark-
 ed out by the prophets, and this glorious dis-
 tinction did Christ display and support in his
 own person throughout the whole course of
 his ministry.

That he was infinitely superior to every
 other teacher of religion in the number, and
 the benevolent nature of his miracles, is well
 known; and that he was no less distinguished

* Isaiah xxix. 18, 19. xxxv. 5, 6. lxi. 1.

by the circumstance of "preaching to the poor;" that there was no one either before or after him, who made it so much his peculiar business to instruct them, and paid such constant and condescending attention to them as he did, is equally certain. The ancient prophets were usually sent to kings and princes, to the rich and the great, and many of their prophecies were couched in sublime figurative language, beyond the comprehension of the vulgar. There were, indeed, other parts of the Jewish scriptures sufficiently plain and intelligible, and adapted to all capacities; but even these the rabbies and the scribes, the great expounders of the law among the Jews, contrived to perplex and darken, and render almost useless by their vain traditions, their absurd glosses, and childish interpretations. So far were they from showing any particular regard or tenderness to the common people, that they held them in the utmost contempt; they considered them as *accursed**, because they knew not that law, which they themselves took care to render impenetrably obscure to them. "They took away the key of knowledge; they entered

* John vii. 48, 49.

"not

“not in themselves, and those that were entering in they hindered *.” It was even a proverbial saying among them, “that the Spirit of God did not rest but upon a rich man †.” So different were the maxims of the great Jewish teachers from the sentiments and conduct of that heavenly Instructor, who openly declared, and gloried in the declaration, that he came “to preach the Gospel to the poor ‡.”

Nor did the lower ranks of mankind meet with better treatment in the heathen world. There were among the ancient Pagans, at different periods, and in different countries, many excellent moral writers of fine talents and profound knowledge; but their compositions were calculated not for the illiterate and

* Luke xi. 52. † Grotius on Matth. xi. 5.

‡ It may be alledged, that by *the poor*, to whom our Lord preached the Gospel, the sacred writers meant not the poor *in circumstances*, but the poor *in spirit*. The truth is, they meant both; by our Saviour's conduct both senses were equally verified; and these two sorts of *poverty* are so frequently found united, that it is scarce necessary, at least in the present instance, to distinguish between them. For more complete satisfaction on this and some other points (of which but a very imperfect view is given here) see Bishop Hurd's admirable sermon on Matth. v. 3. f. 8.

the indigent, but for men of ability and erudition like themselves. They thought the poor below their notice or regard; they could not stoop so low as to accommodate themselves to the understanding of the vulgar. Their ambition, even in their ethical treatises, was to please the learned few. To these the Dialogues of Plato, the Ethics of Aristotle, the Offices of Cicero, the Morals of Seneca and of Plutarch, might afford both entertainment and information; but had they been read to a Grecian or a Roman peasant, he would not, I conceive, have found himself either much enlightened or much improved by them. How should *he* get wisdom from such sources “that
 “holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the
 “goad; that driveth oxen, and is occupied in
 “their labours; that giveth his mind to make
 “furrows, and is diligent to give the kine
 “fodder *.” Very different occupations these from the studies of the philosopher or the metaphysician, and not very well calculated to prepare the mind for the lectures of the academy, the lyceum, or the portico.

* Eccles xxxviii. 25, 26.

The truth is, there was not a single book of morality at that time written solely or principally for the use of the ignorant and the poor; nor had they their duty explained to them in any other mode of instruction adapted to their capacities. They had no lessons of conduct given them so plain, so familiar, so forcible, so authoritative, as those which are now regularly dispensed to every Christian congregation; nothing that made the smallest approach to our Saviour's divine discourses, (especially that from the mount) to the ten commandments, to the other moral parts of the Old and New Testament, or to the practical instructions and exhortations given weekly to the people by the ministers of the Gospel. They were left to form a system of morality for themselves as well as they could; in which they were so far from being assisted by their national religion, that both the mode and the objects of their worship, were of themselves sufficient to corrupt their hearts, and to counteract any right opinions or virtuous inclinations that might casually spring up in their minds.

In this situation did our blessed Lord find the inferior class of mankind when he entered upon his ministry. He found them without guide, instructor, counsellor, or friend. He saw them (to use the affecting language of Scripture) "fainting and scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, and he had compassion upon them *." He took them instantly under his protection, he shared with them the miseries of their condition. He assumed the form of a servant, submitted to all the hardships of that situation, and frequently "had not even where to lay his head." Although he did not *reject* the wealthy and the great, but, on the contrary, received them with the utmost kindness, whenever they shewed any marks of a right and teachable disposition, yet not "*many* noble, not *many* mighty, were at first called †." It was from among fishermen and mechanics that he chose his companions and apostles. It was to the poor he chiefly addressed his discourses. With these he principally lived and conversed; and to their understandings was the greater part of his parables, his allusions, his reasonings, his

* Matth. ix. 36.

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

precepts, and his exhortations, most kindly accommodated.

Thus did our heavenly Instructor most exactly fulfil the predictions of the prophets and his own declarations, that he would evangelize to the poor. The consequence was what might naturally be expected from a measure, as full of wisdom as it was of humanity, although totally opposite to the usual practice of moral teachers. In a short space of time that Gospel, which was at first preached more particularly to the poor, was embraced also by the rich; and became, in a few centuries, the established Religion of the most powerful and extensive empire in the world, as it now is of all the most civilized and most enlightened kingdoms of the earth. Whereas the renowned sages of antiquity, by pursuing a contrary course, by making it their only object to please, amuse, and inform the learned and the great, were never able, with all their wisdom and eloquence, to enlighten or reform a single province, or even a single city of any note or magnitude*.

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* Hence it is obvious to remark, how very unfortunately those writers against Christianity have employed their time and labour,

We have here, then, the utmost encouragement to tread in the steps of our divine Law-giver, and to imitate, as far as we are able, that method of propagating his Religion which he adopted, and which was attended with such signal success. Although it is undoubtedly our duty “to preach the Gospel to every creature *,” to press it on all ranks of people, high and low, rich and poor; yet the example of our Lord plainly calls upon us to show a peculiar attention to those whom Providence has placed in the humbler conditions of life. The reasons for this are obvious: they are the same which probably influenced our Saviour’s conduct in this respect, and they still labour, who have taken so much pains to prove, that among the first converts to that Religion, there were but few in proportion of any considerable rank or fortune. This is a charge which the first preachers of the Gospel were so far from wishing to deny or dissemble, that they openly avowed and gloried in it †. Their successors have as little reason to be afraid, or ashamed of acknowledging the fact as they had. They justly consider it as one proof, among many others, of that *divine wisdom* which superintended and conducted the progress of Christianity, in a way so different from what *worldly wisdom* would have dictated; beginning with the cottage and ending with the imperial throne. False religion has generally reversed this order, and has succeeded accordingly.

* Mark xvi. 15.

† 1 Cor. i. 26.

subsist in their full force. The poor have in general much fewer opportunities of learning their duty themselves than the wealthy and the great: their education seldom qualifies them, and their constant cares and labours leave them but little leisure, for acquiring sufficient religious knowledge without assistance. Their spiritual as well as temporal necessities are but too often overlooked, and disregarded by their superiors, and yet they form by far the largest and most necessary part of the community. Add to all this, that they are commonly much freer from prejudice, much less wedded to systems and opinions, more open to conviction, more anxious to obtain information, and more ready to embrace truth, than the higher ranks of men. These circumstances evidently point them out as objects highly worthy of our utmost care and diligence, in furnishing their minds with those sacred truths, those rules of moral and religious conduct, which are necessary to render them "wise unto salvation."

With this view it was, that *The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge* was first instituted. It breathes the true spirit of Christianity,

anity, and follows, at a humble distance, the example of its divine Author, by diffusing the light of the Gospel more especially among the poor. This is its peculiar province and employment; and there are two ways in which it carries this benevolent purpose into execution.

The first is, by encouraging the erection of charity-schools in every part of the kingdom, and by supplying them afterwards with proper religious instructions and wholesome rules for their direction and good government. The fruit of these its pious labours and exhortations in this city and its neighbourhood, you have now before your eyes. You here see near five thousand children collected together from the charity-schools in and about London and Westminster. A spectacle this, which is not, perhaps, to be paralleled in any other country in the world; which it is impossible for any man of the least sensibility to contemplate without emotions of tenderness and delight; which we may venture to say, that even our Lord himself (who always shewed a remarkable affection for children) would have looked on with complacency; and which

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speaks more forcibly in favour of this branch of the society's paternal care and attention, than any arguments for it that words could convey to you *. I shall, therefore, only observe on this head, that large as the number is of the charity-children now present in this place, it bears but a small proportion to the whole number in the schools of Great Britain and Ireland, which exceeds *forty thousand*. And when you consider that this society was the original promoter, and has been the constant patron and protector of these schools, which have subsisted now for near a century; that the children educated in them are taken from the most indigent and helpless class of people, that, consequently, without these schools, they would probably have had no education at all; and that nothing is so likely to preserve them from idleness, beg-

* The trustees of the charity-schools obtained permission this year, *for the first time*, to range the children (amounting to near five thousand) in a kind of temporary amphitheatre under the dome of St. Paul's, where the service was performed, and the sermon preached, the congregation occupying the area. The effect of so large a number of children, disposed in that form, and uniting with one voice in the responses and in the psalm-singing, was wonderfully pleasing and affecting. This practice has since been continued annually.

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gary, profligacy and misery, as impressing early and strongly on their unoccupied and uncorrupted minds sound principles of piety, industry, honesty, and sobriety; you will be sensible that the society has adopted a plan no less beneficial to the public, than conformable to the sentiments of the great Author of our Religion, in recommending charity-schools as one very effectual method of "preaching the Gospel to the poor."

But the society goes still further than this. It does not confine its cares merely to the *childhood* of the poor; it follows them, with unremitted kindness, through every subsequent period of their lives. It is the guard of their youth; the companion of their manhood, the comfort of their old age. The principal part of its employment is to provide, at a very considerable expence, and to disperse among the lower people of all ages and occupations, a very large number of Bibles, Common Prayer-books, and small tracts, on a variety of religious subjects, composed purposely for their use by men of eminent piety and ability, adapted to their capacities, and accommodated to all their various spiritual wants. In these are explained

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to them, in the clearest and most familiar terms, the first grounds and rudiments of their faith, the main evidences and most essential doctrines of Christianity, the several duties they owe to God, their neighbour, and themselves, and the nature and benefits of the two Christian sacraments. By these, also, they are assisted in the service of the church, in their private devotions, in reading, understanding, and applying the Holy Scriptures; are supported under afflictions, are guarded against temptation, are fortified more especially against those vices to which the poor are most subject, and furnished with proper cautions and arguments, to preserve them from the artifices of popery, and the delusions of enthusiasm.

This is a short sketch of the several objects to which the governing members of our society have directed their attention, and the provision they have made for the instruction of the ignorant and the poor. Of the little treatises here alluded to, some might undoubtedly be much improved, and some, perhaps, might be spared. But many of them are excellent, the greatest part extremely useful, and calculated

lated to do essential service to that rank of men among whom they are distributed. Nor is the benevolence of our society restrained within the limits of this island only. Its principal object is, indeed, as it certainly ought to be, the instruction of our own poor; but it has occasionally extended its kind assistance to other countries, both neighbouring and remote. It has established schools and missions in various parts of the East-Indies, for the conversion and instruction of the Heathens; and has dispersed among them many religious tracts in the Malabar language. It has carried its regard to the Greek church in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt. For this purpose it has printed the New Testament and Psalter in Arabic, and has already sent a large number of both, with some other tracts, into Persia and India. It has published three several editions of the Bible in the Welsh language, and distributed them through every part of Wales, to the amount of fifty thousand copies. It has made provision for the education of youth, and the due celebration of divine worship, in the Scilly islands, where there was the utmost need of both; and it has likewise

likewise printed and dispersed over the Isle of Man many thousand copies of the Old and New Testament, of the Common Prayer, and other religious books, in the vulgar language of that island.

By this constant attention of the managers of the society to the spiritual wants of the poor in many different parts of the world, as well as at home, the number of religious tracts and books which they have distributed, from their first institution to this day, is so immensely great, as almost to exceed belief*. And although, in some instances, the success of their endeavours has not fully answered their expectations, yet there can be no doubt but that upon the whole their labours have done infinite service to the cause of Religion. Indeed, all the clergy who are members of the society, and have made a constant and discreet use of their tracts, can bear, and many of them *have* borne, ample testimony to the advantages resulting from them. Next to the stated offices of divine worship, and the regular instructions

* Even within the last fifty years, the number of books and tracts distributed by them has amounted to no less than 2,834,371.

from

from the pulpit, it is evident, that nothing can contribute more to excite and keep alive a due sense of Religion in the minds of the common people, than supplying them constantly with a variety of well-composed and well-chosen religious treatises, each of them judiciously adapted to their respective necessities. It supplies, in some degree, the want of that most useful branch of ministerial duty which has, I fear, of late years, grown but too much into disuse, *personal conference with our parishioners*; for which, unless we have some such substitute as this, we shall find, probably, that our public instructions will produce much less effect than they naturally ought.

There is another argument for the distribution of small religious tracts among the common people, which has, I think, considerable weight. It appears, that this is the very mode made use of by the adversaries of our Religion, in order to undermine and destroy it. They consider small tracts of infidelity, as the best and most effectual method of disseminating irreligion among their readers and admirers; and, accordingly, have employed all their ta-

lents in composing, and all their industry in dispersing them over the world*.

Let us, then, endeavour to foil our enemies at their own weapons, which will surely prove more powerful, and more successful, in the hands of truth, than in those of error; and let us, with that view, give all possible encouragement to a Society, which is instituted for the very purpose of furnishing us with a constant supply of the best helps towards counteracting the pernicious designs of those who "set themselves against us;" who make use of every artifice to deprive us of all Religion, or to introduce a corrupt one.

Inconsiderable and trivial as the little treatises dispersed by the Society may seem, yet it is by the repeated efforts of such small instruments as these, that the greatest effects are often produced. Their numbers, their plainness, and their cheapness, will give them a force and efficacy, and extent of circulation,

* It is certain, that M. Voltaire, in particular, has written innumerable little pieces against Revelation; that he prided himself greatly in having found out this method of *enlightening the world*: and that he was highly applauded by Mr. D'Alembert and others, for the wisdom and prudence of his conduct in this respect.

which much more voluminous and more laboured compositions may not be able to acquire; just as we see that the lowest and humblest, and most numerous bodies of men, not the opulent and splendid few, are those that constitute the real strength and wealth of the community.

It has been frequently asserted, that it is philosophy, modern philosophy, which has enlightened and improved mankind. But whom has it enlightened and improved? A small knot, perhaps, of wits and philosophers, and learned men; but how have *the multitude*, the bulk of the people, those who really constitute the world, been enlightened and improved? Do *they* read the works of Bolingbroke, of D'Alembert, of Hume, or of Raynal? Thanks be to God those elaborate and bulky compositions are equally beyond their understandings to comprehend, their leisure to peruse, and their ability to purchase. And even the smaller pieces above-mentioned of Voltaire and others, are not calculated for the *lowest classes* of mankind, but for men of some education and some talents. And their object is not to inform, but to perplex and mislead; not to convince

convince by argument, but to entertain with strokes of wit and buffoonery. Most fortunately for mankind, the mischief of such writings is confined (comparatively speaking) to a very narrow circle, which their admirers, however, are pleased to dignify with the name of *the world*. The vulgar, the vile populace, so far are those great philosophers from desiring to instruct and reform, that they think them *utterly unworthy of a reasonable religion*. This the most eminent of their fraternity has declared in express terms*. On the other hand, the Author of *our Religion* declares, that he came "to preach the Gospel to the poor." Here, then, you see opposed to each other the spirit of CHRISTIANITY and the spirit of PHILOSOPHY. Judge ye, for yourselves, which is most worthy of God and beneficial to man, and make your choice accordingly. If you take

* Mr. Voltaire, speaking of certain superstitious sects in China, has these very remarkable words: "Ces sectes sont tolérées a la Chine *pour l'usage du Vulgaire*, comme des aliments grossiers faits pour le nourrir; tandis que les magistrats & les lettrés, séparés en tout du peuple, se nourrissent d'une substance plus pure. *Il semble en effet que la populace ne merite pas une religion raisonnable.*" Essai sur l'Histoire Generale, tom. i. p. 33, 34.

PHILOSOPHY for your guide, you will despise the humble employment of diffusing religious knowledge among the common people ; but if you chuse CHRIST for your master, you will give a proof of it this day, by patronizing a Society that forms itself on *his* model, and professes to carry on the great work of reformation which *He* begun, in the very way which he pointed out, “ by preaching the Gospel to “ the poor.”

SERMON XIII.

I COR. ix. 25.

EVERY MAN THAT STRIVETH FOR THE
MASTERY IS TEMPERATE IN ALL
THINGS: NOW THEY DO IT TO OBTAIN
A CORRUPTIBLE CROWN, BUT WE AN
INCORRUPTIBLE.

THE design of this passage is plainly to recommend the great Christian duty of being "temperate in all things;" that is, of obtaining an entire command over our passions; or, as it is expressed a few verses after, of "keeping under our bodies, and bringing them "into subjection." This self-government is indispensably necessary, both to the real enjoyment of the present life, and to the possession of everlasting happiness in the next. But, then, like every thing else that is valuable, it

is as difficult to acquire, as it is useful and excellent; and it stands in need of the most powerful arguments to recommend and enforce it. One of the strongest is here urged by St. Paul. To raise the courage and invigorate the resolution of the Corinthians, to whom the Epistle is addressed, and of all others engaged in the same state of warfare with their corrupt inclinations, he reminds them of the immortal prize they are contending for, that crown of glory which is to recompence their virtuous conflict. And to give this still greater weight, he compares their rewards with those proposed to the competitors in the well-known games or sports which were celebrated near Corinth. In these, all that was contended for, was nothing more than "a corruptible crown," a wreath composed of perishable leaves: whereas, the prize of the Christian is an incorruptible one, a crown of glory that fadeth not away, an eternity of real and substantial happiness in Heaven. And yet, poor and contemptible as the reward was in those games, they who strove for the mastery in them, were temperate in all things, were content to exercise the strictest discipline and abstemiousness,

stemiousness, to abridge themselves both in the quantity and the quality of their diet; to renounce every pleasure and every indulgence that tended to weaken the body, and voluntarily to undergo many hardships in order to prepare themselves for the contest, and “to run so that they might obtain.” How is it possible, then, after this, for the Christian to complain of the difficulties he has to encounter in this his state of probation, and when celestial rewards are held up to his view, to shrink from the severities through which he must arrive at them? If he has any honest ambition in his nature, will he not emulate the ardour and activity of these Grecian combatants? Will he not chearfully go through a similar course of preparatory discipline? Will he not impose upon himself a little moderation in his pleasures, a little self-government and self-denial? Will he not contentedly give up a few trivial indulgences, and transient gratifications, in order to secure a prize infinitely more glorious than theirs; a crown incorruptible, felicity eternal, commensurate to the existence, and suited to the capacity of an immortal soul?

To this irresistible strength of argument St. Paul subjoins, as an additional motive, his own example. "I therefore," says he, "so run, not as uncertainly," not heedlessly and ignorantly, but with a perfect knowledge of the course I am to pursue, the rules I am to observe, the prize I am to aim at, and the conditions on which it is to be attained. I do not act at random, but upon sure grounds. My views are steadily fixed on the grand point, and I press forwards in the way marked out with unwearied vigour and perseverance. "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air." In this Christian combat I do not mis-spend my activity, and exert my powers to no purpose; I do not fight with my own shadow, or with an imaginary antagonist*, wasting my strength on the empty air; but I strive for the mastery in good earnest; I consider myself as having real enemies to combat, the world, the flesh, and the devil; I know that my life, my salvation, my all, is at stake; and therefore, in imitation of the competitors in the Isthmian game, I exercise a strict government over myself; I sub-

* See the commentators.

due my rebellious passions, by continual acts of self-denial; "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection," lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Such is the reasoning of this eloquent apostle at large; and it behoves us all to pay due attention to it; for, though in one circumstance we do not all resemble him, are not all appointed to preach to others; yet are we all, like him, engaged in the Christian conflict with passion and temptation; and must, like him, either come off victorious in it, and gain the prize, or be shamefully subdued, and lose our own souls.

Ever since the unhappy fall of our first parents, and the confusion introduced by it into our moral frame, the passions have acquired so much strength and boldness, that they aspire to nothing less than an absolute sovereignty over the soul; and we are reduced to the necessity of either governing them, or being governed by them. This is literally the choice proposed to us at our first entrance into life; and it concerns us to weigh and consider it well; for we can never decide on a question of
more

more importance. It is this chiefly that must determine us to virtue and happiness, or to vice and misery. For nothing can be more clear, than that far the greater part of the evils we suffer ourselves, and of those we bring upon others, arise from the dominion of our passions. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, which war in your members?" From whence come murders, robberies, oppression, and fraud? Whence come breaches of friendship and hospitality, violations of the marriage-bed, ruin, infamy, and remorse to unguarded innocence, confusion and distress to whole families, the destruction of our own health and repose, the dissipation of our fortunes, and the consequent wretchedness of all that look up to us for support? Do not all these, and an infinite number of other calamities, spring solely from the brutal violence of headstrong and unruly desires, bursting forth like a torrent upon mankind, throwing down every obstacle, and breaking through every the most sacred fence that opposes itself to their impetuous course?

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Such are the mischiefs which daily follow from suffering them to gain the ascendancy; and such we have to expect from it ourselves. There is, in fact, no drudgery upon earth like that of serving the passions. Of all tyrants in the world, they are the most unrelenting and insupportable. They will utterly debase and unman the soul; debilitate and obscure its noblest powers; force their natural sovereign reason to submit to the meanest offices, and most scandalous artifices, for their gratification; compel us to resign up our truest interests, our most solid comforts, our most valuable expectations; nay, even to invent principles to justify their extravagancies, to reject the revelation that condemns them, to strip ourselves of all claim to immortality, to doubt every thing, to dispute every thing except their commands.

To avoid these dreadful mischiefs, which are by no means exaggerated, there is no other way left; but to resolve with St. Paul, on "keeping under our body, and bringing it into subjection." But this, too, though attended at the last with the happiest consequences, is not, however, without its difficulties.

ties. These, indeed, to all are not the same: there is, undoubtedly, a difference in the constitution of our minds, as well as of our bodies; and some men are blest with such singularly happy dispositions, such sober desires, such tractable and obedient inclinations, that, with a common degree of prudence and circumspection, and Christian discipline, they preserve the utmost tranquillity and order in the soul, go on uniformly, and almost without interruption, in the discharge of their duty, and find the ways of Religion “to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths to be peace.” Blest, indeed, beyond measure, are such persons as these, infinitely better provided for the journey of life, and infinitely better furnished with the proper materials of happiness than those who are generally much more envied, but with much less reason; those who are favoured with riches, genius, rank or power. These are contemptible things compared to the inconceivable comfort of a well-ordered mind, and well-governed affections, which, in a work of infinite importance that must be done, leave us nothing but what it is extremely easy to do. But with the generality of mankind,

kind, this is far from being the case. Almost every one finds within himself some one unruly passion at least, which is continually disturbing his repose, and endangering his innocence; and which, without the utmost vigilance and resolution, he finds it impossible to subdue. Even he who "delights in the law of God after the inward man, frequently sees another law in the outward man, war-ring against the law of his mind, and bringing it into captivity to the law of sin." Unable to rescue himself from this wretched slavery, and equally unable to support the consequences of submitting to it, no wonder if such an one, in the utmost agony of mind, cries out with St. Paul in his assumed character, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; there is one that can, and will deliver you, even the Redeemer that died for you. He it is who will do what no other moral guide can do for you; will both enable you, by additional supplies of strength, to overcome those lusts which war against your soul, and will also crown that victory by a reward more than

than adequate to the pain of the conflict. If Christianity requires from its votaries a higher degree of sanctity and purity, and a stricter command over the passions than any other Religion, it has a right to do so; because it affords proportionably greater helps towards accomplishing that great work, and a proportionably greater prize to recompence the labour of it. For however severe this struggle with our appetites may be to us, and severe enough, God knows, it sometimes is, yet it is our comfort, that if we endure to the end, "those light afflictions which are but for a moment, shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This single consideration is enough to make us "more than conquerors through Christ that strengtheneth us." For who that has in view immortal joys and incorruptible crowns, can repine at the conflict he must go through to obtain them? Who, that professes himself in earnest a disciple of Christ, can murmur at the hardship of mortifying his passions, when even they who strive for the mastery in the most trivial contests, and for the silliest rewards, are temperate in all things? The instance produced in the text to

prove this, was full to the purpose; was peculiarly calculated to strike the Corinthians, being a familiar, and, as it were, domestic fact, within the compass of their own observation. Its force is very little, if at all, abated, when applied to ourselves; but if we have a mind for similar instances nearer home, they are to be found in abundance. We may see numbers of our fellow-creatures, on every side of us, undergoing the greatest labours and inconveniences in pursuit of the most trivial and worthless objects. We see the vicious man frequently taking more pains, and struggling through greater distresses, in order to gratify his passions, than it would cost him to subdue them. We see the avaricious man tormenting himself with continual care and anxiety, submitting to the meanest and most sordid artifices to acquire wealth and to retain it; practising severer mortifications than the utmost rigour of monastic discipline would exact, denying himself not only the most innocent gratifications, but the common necessities of life; and sometimes even perishing for want in the midst of abundance. And what is the great object of all this voluntary self-denial? It is to
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amass a hoard of wealth which he has not the spirit to use in this world, nor the power of carrying with him into the next.

We see others who cannot justly be charged with avarice; yet stimulated by the ambition of raising themselves and their families to opulence and distinction, and with that view sacrificing their youth, their ease, their health, their comfort, the best and happiest part of their days to the labour of some most painful employment, which at last, perhaps, rewards them with a fortune, when disease, or old age, or death, render them incapable of enjoying it.

We see the man of adventure and of enterprise penetrating the most remote and inhospitable regions of the earth, exposing himself to unwholesome climates and untried oceans, encountering the dangers of rocks and tempests, of famine and disease, of treachery and violence from unrelenting savages; and all this in the pursuit of knowledge or of emolument, which seldom answer his expectations, or of a visionary fame, which perhaps commences not, till he is gone "to that land where all things are forgotten."

These

These are instances of self-denial which we have every day before our eyes ; and shall we, then, be deterred from the pursuit of our eternal interests, and of immortal glory, by the restraints and the difficulties attending our Christian warfare, when we see men voluntarily and cheerfully encountering far greater hardships, and far severer trials for the sake of acquiring what appears to them most valuable in this life, but which they find in the end to be delusive and unsatisfactory.

It is, in short, a vain and a foolish attempt to think of separating, in any instance, great labour and difficulty from great attainments. And the more valuable the acquisition, the more severe are the hardships that obstruct the way to it. The lowest mechanic arts can never be carried to any degree of perfection without much toil ; works of imagination, intellectual accomplishments, require still more ; virtue and religion, as being the greatest ornaments of our nature, most of all. But then the reward is in proportion to the labour ; and to renounce the one through a cowardly fear of the other, is one of the meanest thoughts that can enter the human mind.

It is hard sometimes, it is confessedly hard, to deny a craving appetite, and to subdue a vicious habit; but is it not still harder to lose everlasting happiness for a momentary indulgence; and, like the wretched Esau, to sell Heaven in reversion for a mess of pottage?

Let us eat and drink, says the voluptuary; let us indulge without delay, and without reserve, every appetite of our nature, for "to-morrow we die," to-morrow we may cease to exist, and all possibility of any further enjoyment will be for ever gone. Let us, then, take our full measure of it while we can. "Let us enjoy the good things that are present. Let us fill ourselves with costly wines and ointments; and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness. Let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion, and our lot is this*." This language cannot be wondered at, from the man who rejects all idea of a future existence. But it would be folly and madness in him, who be-

* Wisdom ii. 6. 10.

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believes the Christian doctrine of a resurrection, and a retribution in another world. To him the conclusion, from the very same premises, must be a directly opposite one. It must be plainly this: Let us keep our hearts with all diligence, and restrain our passions within the bounds of duty, for to-morrow we may die; to-morrow we may be called to give an account of our moral conduct to the great Sovereign of the Universe, who has peremptorily commanded us to be temperate in all things. Let this consideration, then, be deeply fixed in our hearts, and be constantly present to our thoughts, and it will, in the hour of trial, add strength to our resolutions, and fortitude to our souls. It is not, it must be confessed, a very easy task to keep that strict and steady command over ourselves which Christianity requires. But we must not be much surprized, if the rewards of Heaven are not to be had for nothing. Immortal glory, and everlasting felicity, are not such very trivial things, as to be obtained without any exertions on our part. Some price must surely be paid for such an acquisition, something *must* be given up in present for an inheritance of such infinite value in future.

future. "There is but one paradise for men," said Mahomet, (turning away his eyes from the tempting prospect of Damascus) "there is but one paradise for men, and, for my part, I will not take mine in this world*." If this sensual impostor could, in this instance at least, sacrifice present gratification even to his false notions of future happiness, well may we be content to endure a little temporary self-denial for the sake of a recompence hereafter, perfect in its nature, and endless in its duration. It is true, indeed, that taking all things into the account, the yoke of our divine Master is easy, and his burthen is light. Yet still there is a yoke, there is a burden to bear. We are to take up our cross, and on that cross we are to crucify our affections and lusts. In the successive stages of our existence here, successive adversaries rise up to oppose our progress to Heaven, and bring us into captivity to sin and misery. Pleasure, interest, business, power, honour, fame, all the follies and all the corruptions of this world, each in their turn, assail our feeble nature, and through these we must manfully fight our way to the

* Maundrell, p. 121.

great end we have in view. But the difficulty and the pain of this contest will be infinitely lessened, by a resolute and vigorous exertion of our powers, and our resources, at our first setting out in life. If we strenuously resist those enemies of our salvation that present themselves to us in our earliest youth, all the rest that follow in our mature age will be an easy conquest. On him, who in the beginning of life has kept himself unspotted from the world, all its subsequent attractions and allurements, all its magnificence, wealth, and splendour, will make little or no impression. A mind that has been long habituated to discipline, restraint, and self-command, amidst far more powerful temptations, will have nothing to apprehend from such assailants as these. But our great and principal security is assistance from above, which will never be denied to those who fervently apply for it. And with the omnipotence of divine grace to support us, and an eternity of happiness to reward us, what is there that can shake our constancy, or corrupt our fidelity?

Set yourselves, then, without delay, to acquire an early habit of strict self-government,

and an early intercourse with your Almighty Protector. Let it be your first care to establish the sovereignty of reason, and the empire of grace, over your souls, and it will soon be no pain to you; but, on the contrary, a real pleasure "to be temperate in all things." Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit yourselves like men, be strong, be resolute, be patient. Look frequently up to the prize that is set before you, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Consider, that every pang you feel on account of your duty here, will be placed to your credit, and encrease your happiness, hereafter. The conflict with your passions will grow less irksome every day, a few years will put an entire end to it, and you will then, to your unspeakable comfort, be enabled to cry out with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

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SERMON XIV.

MATTHEW XXVII. 54.

TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD.

WE have here a testimony of the divine character of our blessed Lord, which must be considered as in the highest degree impartial and incorrupt. It is the testimony not of friends, but of enemies; not of those who were prepossessed in favour of Christ and his Religion, but of those who, by habit and education, were prejudiced, and strongly prejudiced, against them. It is, in short, the voice of nature and of truth; the honest, unpremeditated confession of the heathen centurion, and the soldiers under him, whom the Roman governor had appointed as a guard over the crucifixion of our Lord. So forcibly struck were these persons with the behaviour of Jesus,

and the astonishing circumstances attending his death, that they broke out involuntarily into the exclamation of the text, "Truly this was *the Son of God.*"

Different opinions, it is well known, have been entertained by learned men concerning the precise sense in which the centurion understood Christ to be *the Son of God.* But without entering here into any critical niceties (which do not in the least affect the main object of this discourse) I shall only observe in general, that even after making every abatement which either grammatical accuracy, or parallel passages, may seem to require, the very lowest meaning we can affix to the text, in any degree consistent with the natural force of the language, and the magnitude of the occasion, is this: that the centurion, comparing together every thing he had seen, and rising in his expressions of admiration, as our Lord's encreasing magnanimity grew more and more upon his observation, concluded him to be, and not only a person of most extraordinary virtue, and most transcendent righteousness, but of a nature *more than human*, and bearing evident marks of a *divine original.*

That his conclusion went at least so far as this, will appear highly probable from considering the two distinct grounds on which it was founded.

The first was, the attention with which the centurion appears to have marked the whole behaviour of our Lord during the dreadful scene he passed through, from the beginning to the end of his sufferings upon the cross. He placed himself, as St. Mark informs us, *over against* Jesus. From that station he kept his eye constantly fixed upon him, and observed, with anxious care, every thing he said or did. And when he saw the meekness, the patience, the resignation, the firmness, with which our Lord endured the most excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time praying fervently for his murderers; at another disposing, with dignity and authority, of a place in paradise, to one of his fellow-sufferers; and, at length, with that confidence which nothing but conscious virtue, and conscious divinity, could, at such a time, inspire, recommending his spirit into the hands of his *heavenly Father*; from these circumstances, what other inference could the centurion draw than that

Jesus

Jesus was not merely a *righteous* but a *heavenly-born* person?

But there was another, and that a still more powerful proof of our Lord's celestial origin, which offered itself to the centurion's notice; I mean, the astonishing events that took place when Jesus expired; the agitation into which all nature seemed to be thrown, the darkness, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, miracles which the centurion conceived, and justly conceived, were not likely to be wrought on the death of a *mere mortal**.

And, indeed, it must be acknowledged, that the miracles recorded, and the prophecies accomplished, in the history of Christ, are the two great pillars on which our faith in him must principally rest. But as an enquiry into, this sort of proof, would lead us into an argument much too extensive and too complex for our present purpose, I shall content myself with enlarging a little on that other kind of evidence above-mentioned, the character and conduct of our divine Master. Of this the centurion says:

* See Dr. Doddridge's note from Elsnar in his exposition of this passage.

nothing more perhaps, than the closing scene. And if this operated so forcibly, as it seems to have done, on *his* mind, how powerfully must *ours* be affected, by taking into the account the virtues which Jesus displayed through life, as well as those he manifested at his death? We may reasonably expect, that it will at once confirm the faith of those who believe, and produce conviction in those who do not.

Were we only to say of our Saviour, what even Pilate said of him, *that we can find no fault in him*, that the whole temper of his soul, and the whole tenour of his life, were absolutely blameless throughout; that from the first moment of his birth, to his last agony on the cross, he never once fell into the smallest error of conduct, never once spake unadvisedly with his lips; were we, I say, to confine ourselves solely to this *negative* kind of excellence, it is more than can be said of any other person that ever yet came into the world. But great and uncommon as even this sort of perfection is, it forms but a very small part of that which belonged to Jesus. He was not
only

only exempt from every the slightest failing, but he possessed and practised every imaginable virtue that was consistent with his situation; and *that*, too, in the highest degree of excellence to which virtue is capable of being exalted. That idea of complete goodness which the ancient philosophers took so much fruitless pains to describe, and which they justly thought would so strongly attract the affections of men if it could be made visible, was in the person of the Holy Jesus, and *in him only*, since the world began, presented to the eyes of mankind. His ardent love for God, his zeal for the service, his resignation to the will, his unreserved obedience to the commands of his heavenly Father; the compassion, the kindness, the solicitude, the tenderness, he showed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the consummate prudence with which he eluded all the snares that were laid for him; the wisdom, the justness, the delicacy of his replies; the purity and the gentleness of his manners; the sweetness yet dignity

dignity of his deportment; the mildness with which he reproved the mistakes, the prejudices, and the failings of his disciples; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations from his enemies; the patience, the compassure, the meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most painful and ignominious death that human ingenuity could devise, or human malignity inflict; and that divinely charitable prayer which he put up for his murderers in the very midst of his agony; "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do:" all these, and a multitude of other peculiar excellencies in his character, (which it is impossible here to enumerate) concur to render him, beyond comparison, the greatest, the wisest, and the best, of men.

Considered more particularly as A PUBLIC TEACHER, what an understanding must that have been, and whence enlightened, from which so sublime and perfect a system of piety and morals as that of the Gospel, proceeded, excelling not only all the discoveries of men, and the most perfect systems of Pagan morality,

rality, but all the revelations of God made before him *.

But further still. How astonishing, and from what source inspired, must the mind of that man be, who could entertain so vast a thought in so low a condition, as that of instructing and reforming *a whole world*; a world divided between atheism and superstition, but universally abandoned to sin; of teaching the whole race of mankind to live soberly, righteously, and godly here, and leading them on to an eternity of happiness hereafter? How contemptible a figure do they, who affected to be the conquerors of the world, make, when compared with him who undertook to be the saviour of it? Then, in the execution of this immense design, what condescension without meanness, what majesty without pride, what firmness without obstinacy, what zeal without bitterness or enthusiasm, what piety without superstition; how wonderful a combination of seemingly most opposite, if any *could be* opposite, virtues; how exact a temperature of every thing great, and

* For the principal and most valuable part of the six following pages, I am indebted to my late excellent friend and patron Archbishop Secker.

venerable,

venerable, and lovely, in his soul ! And another very important and remarkable consideration is, that all these admirable qualities appeared perfectly easy and natural to him, and seemed not to require the least exertion of his mind to produce or to support them. And the case was the same in his discourses and his instructions. No emotion when he delivered the most sublime and affecting doctrines, the most comfortable or most terrifying predictions. The prophets before him fainted and sunk under the communications which they received from above. But truths that overwhelmed the *servants* of God, were familiar to his *Son*. Composed on the greatest occasions, respectable even on the least, he was at all times the same ; and the uniform dignity and propriety of his behaviour throughout, evidently flowed from the inbred grandeur and rectitude of his mind. Tried he was every way (and that in so public a life perpetually) by wicked men, by the wicked one, by friends as well as by enemies ; but far from being overcome, never once disconcerted, never once embarrassed, but calmly superior to every artifice, to every temptation, to every difficulty.

Well

Well, then, may we ask, even after this very short and very imperfect sketch of our Saviour's character, "whence has this man these things, and what wisdom is this, that is given unto him?" He had evidently none of the usual means or opportunities of cultivating his understanding, or improving his heart. He was born in a low and indigent condition, without education, without learning, without any models to form himself upon, either in his own time, and his own country, or in any records of former ages, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. Yet, notwithstanding this, he manifested and supported invariably through life such wisdom and such virtue as were never before found united, and, we may venture to say, never will be again united in any human being. The consequence, then, is unavoidable, and one of these two things *must* be true. Either the character of our Lord, as drawn in the Gospels, must be absolutely ideal and fictitious, existing no where but in the imagination of those who drew it; or else the person to whom it really belonged must be endowed with powers more than human. For never
did

did mere mortal man either speak or act as Jesus did.

If we take the former part of the alternative, and affirm, that the portrait of our Saviour, as drawn in the Gospels, is an ideal one; where, in the first place, shall we find the man that could draw it? where shall we find the man, who, by the mere force of imagination, could invent a character at once so absolutely perfect, and so truly original? The circumstances of his uniting the divine and human nature in one person, and of his being at one and the same time the Messiah of the Jews, and the Instructor, the Redeemer, the Mediator, and the Judge of mankind, are so very peculiar, and so perfectly new; and yet all these several parts are so well supported, and preserved so distinct, and every thing our Saviour said or did is so admirably accommodated to each, that to form such a character as this, without any original to copy it from, exceeds the utmost stretch of human invention. Even the best of the Greek and Roman writers never produced any thing to be compared with it, either in point of originality or of excellence, though they frequently exerted them-

selves to the utmost in forming beautiful portraits of wisdom, greatness, and goodness of mind, sometimes in the way of compliment, sometimes of instruction. — But however some extraordinary genius, in the polite and learned nations of the world, might have succeeded in such an attempt, let it be remembered that the historians of Jesus were Jews, natives of a remote, and, in general, unlettered corner of the world. How came *they* by such extraordinary powers of invention? They have never shewn such powers in any other instance. Not even the sublimest of their own sacred books equal, in this respect, the history of the Gospel; much less their apocryphal writings, much less Philo and Josephus, though instructed in Pagan literature and philosophy. And as to the succeeding rabbies, they have not given the history of a single person that is not over-run with wildness and absurdity. Or if we think it possible that *one* Jew, at least, might be found, who, with the help of extraordinary talents, and a better education than any of the rest ever had, might do so much more than any of the rest ever did, what colour can there be for applying this to the EVANGELISTS, to those

who have been so often, and so opprobriously, called the publicans, the tent-makers, and the fishermen of Galilee? *They* had never studied at Athens or at Rome. *They* had no superior talents, no learning, no education, no skill in designing or colouring ideal characters. It is not most assuredly, it is not men such as these that *invent*.

Nay, further still, had they been ever so capable of forming such a character as that of our Saviour, what reason in the world is there to imagine, that they would have ascribed it to their *Messiah*. They expected *him* to be of a spirit and a behaviour widely different from that of the meek, and humble, and passive Jesus. They expected an enterprizing and prosperous warrior, avenging the injurious sufferings of his countrymen, trampling the nations under his feet, and establishing the Jewish empire, and with it the Jewish law, throughout the world. Possessed as they were with these notions, instead of drawing for their promised Deliverer such a portrait as the Gospel presents to us, had they seen it ready drawn, and been asked whose it was, *he* would have been the last person upon earth

for whom they would have conceived it intended.

Besides, what conceivable inducement could the sacred historians have to impose an imaginary personage upon the world? and why, above all, should they persevere in this imposition, when they saw and felt that hatred, and persecution, and death, were the certain consequences of their maintaining the reality of a character, which they knew all the while to be a mere phantom of their own creation, and could have saved themselves by confessing it? But even if it were possible that human creatures might, contrary to all honesty, and all interest, be thus unaccountably bent on deceiving, we have as full evidence as can be, that the Evangelists were *not* so. There is manifestly an air of simplicity and godly sincerity, of plain, unornamented truth in every thing they relate; nothing wrought up with art, nothing studiously placed in the fairest light to attract the eye, no solicitude to dwell even on the most illustrious part of our Saviour's character; but, on the contrary, so dry and cold a manner of telling the most striking facts, and most affecting truths, as furnishes
ground

ground to apprehend that they themselves did not always distinctly perceive the divine wisdom and excellence of many things said and done by Jesus, and recorded in their books. At least, they have by no means brought them forward into view as they well deserved, and as men who wrote *with a design* would most certainly have done. This very circumstance, added to the whole turn and tenor of their writings, most clearly prove, that they followed with religious care, and delivered with scrupulous fidelity, *truth* and *fact*, as it appeared to them, and nothing else.

It is evident, therefore, upon the whole; that our blessed Lord was, in reality, the very person that he is represented to be in the Gospel. And as he is represented to have possessed a degree of perfection, both intellectual and moral, far beyond what human nature is capable of arriving at, and that, too, without any of the common means of acquiring such perfection, the conclusion can be no other than this, *that both he and his Religion came from God.*

But it may still, perhaps, be said, that there is no necessity for supposing any thing *super-*

natural in the case. He was only one of those wonderful and extraordinary characters that sometimes appear even in the very lowest stations; and by the force of great natural talents, a native dignity of mind, and a constitutional goodness of disposition, break out from the obscurity of their situation, and rise superior to all the rest of mankind.

But besides what has been already insisted on, that no such character as that of Christ is to be found in any nation of the world, in any period of time, or any situation of life, it must be remembered, that our Lord *himself* laid claim to something *more* than the character of a great and a good man. He laid claim to a *divine original*. He affirmed, that he was the Son of God, and that He and his Father were one. If, therefore, this was not the case, he must have been either an enthusiast or an impostor. In other words, he must have been a very weak, or a very wicked man. But either of these suppositions is utterly irreconcilable with the description that has just been given of him, with every idea of wisdom and of goodness, which yet he has been proved, and is allowed to have possessed, in their utmost

most extent. Whoever, then, acknowledges him to be a great, a wise, and a perfectly good man, *must* also, *on his own principles*, allow him that DIVINITY which he claimed.

Here, then, is a proof of the divine authority of our Lawgiver, and our Religion, which every one may comprehend, and which it will not be easy for any one to withstand. Some alledge that they want leisure, and others that they want learning or ability, to investigate with sufficient care and accuracy, the prophetic, the miraculous, and the historical evidences of our faith *. This, indeed, is commonly nothing more than mere pretence. But even this pretence is taken away by the argument here offered to their consideration. It is involved in no difficulty, and requires no laborious or critical examination, no uncommon degree of sagacity or ability to decide upon. Nothing more is requisite than to lay open the Bible, and to contemplate the character of our Lord, as it is there drawn with the most perfect fairness and honesty by the Evangelists.

* The proofs of Christianity depend on the laborious investigation of historic evidence, and speculative theology. *History of the Decline of the Roman Empire*, vol. 3. p. 366.

Whoever can judge of any thing, can judge of this; and we know by experience, that it is calculated to carry conviction even into the most *unwilling* minds. We have seen, that even a Pagan centurion, when he beheld Jesus expiring on the cross, could not forbear crying out (and many others with him) "Truly this "was the Son of God." And it is very remarkable, that the contemplation of the very same scene, as described in the Gospel history, extorted a similar, but still stronger confession of Christ's divine nature, from one of the most eloquent of modern sceptics *, who has never been accused of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himself to resist the force even of miracles and of prophecies, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence arising from the *character, the conduct, and the sufferings of Christ*. "Where," says he, "is the man, where is the philosopher, who can act, suffer, and die, without weakness, and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the same time me-

* Rousseau.

riting the sublimest rewards of virtue, he paints precisely every feature in the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance is so striking, that all the fathers have observed it, and it is impossible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindness, must possess the mind of that man who *dares* to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the Son of Mary? What a distance is there between the one and the other? The death of Socrates, philosophizing calmly with his friends, is the most gentle that can be wished; that of Jesus expiring in torments, insulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the most horrible that can be imagined. Socrates taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who presents it to him; and who, in the very act of presenting it, melts into tears. Jesus, in the midst of the most agonizing tortures, prays for his enraged executioners. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God *."

It is not, then, the *prejudice* (as it has been called) of a Christian education, it is not the mere dotage of superstition, or the mere en-

* Emile, v. 2, p. 167.

thufiasm of pious affection and gratitude towards our Redeemer, which makes us difcover in his character plain and evident marks of the SON OF GOD. They have been difcovered and acknowledged by men who were troubled with no fuch religious infirmities ; by one man who was a profefled Pagan, and by another man who, without profefling it, and perhaps without knowing it, was in fact little better than a Pagan. On the ftrength of thefe testimonies, then, added to the proofs which have been here adduced, we may fafely affume it as a principle, *that Jefus is the fon of God*. The neceffary confequence is, that every thing he taught comes to us with the weight and fanktion OF DIVINE AUTHORITY, and demands from every fincere difciple of Chrift implicit belief, and implicit obedience. We muft not, after this, pretend (as is now too much the prevailing mode) to felect juft what we happen to like in the Gofpel, and lay afide all the reft ; to admit, for inftance, the moral and preceptive part, and reject all thofe fublime doctrines which are peculiar to the Gofpel, and which form the wall of partition between Chriftianity, and what is called natural Religion.

gion. This is assuming a liberty, and creating a distinction, which no believer in the divine authority of our Lord, can on any ground justify. Christ delivered all his doctrines in the name of God. He required that all of them, without exception, should be received. He has given no man a licence to adopt just as much, or as little of them, as he thinks fit. He has authorized no one human being to add thereto, or diminish therefrom.

Let us, then, never presume thus to new-model the Gospel, according to our own particular humour or caprice, but be content to take it as God has thought fit to leave it. Let us admit, as it is our bounden duty, on the sole ground of his authority, those mysterious truths which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was *natural* and *reasonable* to expect, in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, “the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity *.” “Let us not exercise ourselves in great matters which are too high for us, but refrain our souls and keep them low †.” Laying aside all the superfluity and all the pride of

* Isaiah lvii. 15.

Pl. cxxxi. 1.

human wisdom, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," without refining, without philosophizing. Let us put ourselves, without delay and without reserve, into the hands of our heavenly Guide, and submit our judgments, with boundless confidence, to his direction, who is "the way, the truth, and the life *." Since we *know* in whom we believe; since it has been this day proved by one kind of argument, and might be proved by a thousand others, that he is the SON OF GOD; let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right, to the obedience of our *understandings*, as well as to the obedience of our *wills*. Let us, therefore, resolutely beat down every bold imagination, "every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and receiving with meekness the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls †."

* John xiv, 6.

† James i. 21.

SERMON XV*.

PSALM xxvii. 16.

O TARRY THOU THE LORD'S LEISURE; BE STRONG, AND HE SHALL COMFORT THINE HEART; AND PUT THOU THY TRUST IN THE LORD.

THAT this life is not, and was not intended to be, a state of perfect happiness, or even of constant ease and tranquillity, is a truth which no one will be disposed to controvert. That we are beset with dangers, and exposed to calamities of various kinds, which we can neither foresee nor avert, is equally certain. It is a fact, which, probably, most of those who now hear me know too well, from their own experience; and the rest will most assuredly know it, full time enough: for there cannot be a weaker or more childish

* Preached at St. Paul's on the Thanksgiving-day, April 23, 1789.

imagination,

imagination, than to flatter ourselves with the hope of passing through the world without our share of those calamities, which are inseparable from mortality. Affliction, then, of one kind or other, being unavoidable, it is evidently a matter of the very last importance to every human being, to enquire carefully what are the best and most solid supports and consolations under it; where they are to be found, and how to be secured. Now, the shortest and most effectual way of obtaining satisfaction on these points is, to apply to men of the best judgment, and most experience in the case; to those who have themselves passed through the greatest variety of sufferings, have sought for every possible alleviation of them that could be found, and are therefore the best able to decide on the value and the efficacy of the remedies they have actually tried. If we turn our thoughts to men of this description, we shall find few persons better qualified to give us compleat information on this head, than the Royal Author of the text before us. He was initiated early in the school of adversity; and though he was afterwards raised, by the hand of Providence, to a throne, yet, in that exalted situation,

situation, he experienced a long succession of the severest trials, and the bitterest afflictions, that are incident to human nature. How much he felt on these occasions, is sufficiently evident from his writings, in which he gives vent to the distress and agony of his soul in the strongest and most impassioned language that grief can dictate. Yet with these complaints are mingled generally the warmest expressions of gratitude and thankfulness, for the unspeakable comforts he frequently experienced under these calamities, and the hopes he entertained, not only of being enabled to bear them patiently, but of finally triumphing over them. From whence, then, were these comforts and these hopes derived? This is the great question; the great object of our present enquiry. And the answer to it is in few words. They were derived from TRUST IN GOD. This it was which he declared to be his great refuge in distress, his shield, his rock, his castle, his house of defence, his best and firmest stay under all his various misfortunes. This holy confidence is, indeed, the most striking and prominent feature in his character. It discovers itself in every page of his writings. It sometimes

sometimes throws a ray of chearfulness even over his gloomiest moments, and unexpectedly turns his heaviness into joy. "In the Lord put I my trust," says he, "how say ye then to my soul, that she should flee as a bird unto the hill? The Lord is my refuge, and my God is the strength of my confidence. In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul. They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek thee*." And again, in the words of the text, "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord."

This great example, then, is a powerful recommendation of that sovereign medicine to the afflicted soul, TRUST IN GOD. But does Christianity also encourage us to have recourse to it? And does it promise us the same consolation that the Royal Psalmist derived from it? It promises to us, that if we faithfully serve the great Author and Preserver of

* Ps. xi. 1. xciv. 22. ix. 10.

our being, he will permit nothing to befall us but what is *upon the whole* beneficial to us, and that "he will make all things work together for good to them that love him*." He expressly tells us, that "whom he loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth †." Afflictions, therefore, far from being any marks of God's displeasure, are proofs of his kindness to us. They are fatherly corrections, they are friendly admonitions, they are salutary, though unpalatable medicines. They are, in short, instruments in the hands of our Maker, to improve our minds, to rectify our failings, to detach us from the present scene, to fix our affections on things above, and thus form in us that humble and devout temper of mind, and unblemished sanctity of life, which are necessary to qualify us for the great purpose of our creation, the attainment of everlasting happiness in another and a better world.

These considerations are a solid ground for that firm TRUST in the wisdom and the goodness of God, which will be sufficient to support us, even when his hand lies heaviest upon

* Rom. viii. 28.

† Heb. xii. 6.

us. And we know, in fact, that it *has* supported the greatest and the best of men under the severest pressure of affliction.

But great as this consolation is, our divine Religion has greater still in store for us. We are encouraged to hope not only for comfort and assistance *under* affliction, but sometimes also for relief, and even deliverance *out* of it. We are commanded “ to be careful for no-
“ thing; but in every thing by prayer and
“ supplication to make our requests known
“ unto God. We are assured, that the ef-
“ fectual fervent prayer of a righteous man
“ availeth much; that the eyes of the Lord
“ are over the righteous, and his ears are open
“ to their prayer; that godliness is profitable
“ unto all things, having the promise of the
“ life that now is, and of that which is to
“ come; and that if we seek first the kingdom
“ of God, and his righteousness, all other
“ things shall be added to us *.”

But how, says the disputer of this world, can these things be? How is it possible that God should thus interpose in behalf of individuals, or even of nations, without either in-

* Phil. iv. 6. James v. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 12. 1 Tim. iv. 8. Matth. vi. 33.

interrupting the course of nature, or over-ruling the free agency of his rational creatures? Admitting, for a moment, this supposed difficulty; who shall presume to say, that the great Governor of the Universe may not, if he sees fit, suspend, or alter, for an instant, those general laws, which he has himself established? Who will venture to affirm, that on great and momentous occasions, which involve the fate, not only of the greatest persons, but of the greatest empires upon earth, he may not, even by extraordinary means, bring about such events, as he sees requisite for the general good?

But these suppositions are unnecessary. There are, undoubtedly, a thousand ways in which the Supreme Lord of all may, without the least violation of the ordinary course of nature, give a new turn to human affairs, and produce, unexpectedly, the most disastrous or most beneficial effects. He can render the most regular operations of the material world, and the freest actions of his creatures, subservient to his will; and by the instrumentality of second causes, can accomplish every purpose of his wise and righteous government. He can, for

instance, at particular periods, raise up persons with dispositions and talents peculiarly adapted to the execution of his designs. He can place them in circumstances and situations, and present to their minds objects and incitements calculated to promote the gracious ends he has in view. He can so dispose, adjust, and combine the common occurrences of life, as to draw from them whatever consequences he thinks fit; and (as almost every day's experience may convince us) he can, by incidents the most trivial, and apparently the most fortuitous, give birth to the most important changes and revolutions on the great theatre of the world.

That by these and various other means (utterly beyond the reach of our conceptions) he both may, and will, whenever he sees it expedient, interpose in the concerns of men; and that he will more particularly sometimes rescue his faithful servants from impending misery and ruin, is so far from being incredible, or even improbable, that it would be injurious to the honour and dignity of his government, it would be repugnant to all our ideas of his moral attributes, and even to the clearest principles

ciples of reason and found philosophy, to suppose the contrary.

It would be preposterous to maintain, that he has so entirely given up the reins of government out of his hands, so irrevocably bound himself by fixt and immutable laws and ordinances, that he can never, in any circumstances, or on any emergency, show himself plainly to be the Sovereign Ruler of the World. That he should thus manifest himself at proper intervals to the sons of men, not only to protect the good, but to awaken the thoughtless from that forgetfulness of him, into which they are but too apt to fall, seems highly requisite, and worthy of him who is the great Lord of the Universe. All ages, and all nations, have concurred in believing such interpositions of the Almighty, and have applied to him on that belief; and Revelation places the doctrine beyond all controversy.

And, thanks be to God, these conclusions of reason, and these promises of Scripture, have been happily confirmed to us by our own repeated experience. There is not a nation upon earth, that has been favoured with a greater number of providential deliverances

than our own ; and there are none of these that are impressed with plainer and more unequivocal marks of a divine interposition, than that, which is now the subject of our thanksgivings to Heaven. Incredulity itself has been compelled to own, that the hand of God has been visible on the present occasion ; nor is the joy of the nation more universal, than its belief of that great and important truth. But above all, the heart of our SOVEREIGN is deeply impressed with this conviction, that IN GOD WAS HIS HELP ; and that, to his peculiar blessings on the means used for his recovery, that recovery is to be ascribed. Throughout the whole of his severe trial, his TRUST IN GOD never forsook him : and before that God he now appears in this holy and venerable structure, surrounded with his faithful and affectionate subjects, to offer up, in the most public manner, and with a seriousness and a solemnity suited to the occasion, his praises and thanksgivings for those signal mercies, which have been so recently vouchsafed to him, and through him to this whole kingdom. A spectacle more striking, more awful, more dignified, more interesting, more edifying, has
scarce

scarce ever been presented to the observation of mankind. I know not whether we are to except even that celebrated one recorded in the first book of Kings, where a great and a pious monarch, in the presence of his whole kingdom, prostrated himself before that magnificent edifice, which he had just erected to the honour of his Maker, and then spreading forth his hands towards Heaven, poured out the devout emotions of his soul, in that inimitable prayer delivered down to us in the sacred writings *. This, it must be confessed, was a scene most eminently calculated to raise the soul towards Heaven ; to fill it with the sublimest conceptions of the Deity, and to impress it with the liveliest sentiments of veneration, piety, devotion, and gratitude. And surely effects of a similar nature, and little inferior in degree, may be expected from the present awful solemnity. For though the two occasions are, it must be owned, in some respects dissimilar ; though we are not now met to dedicate a TEMPLE to God ; yet we are met, I trust, for a still nobler dedication, for the dedication of a WHOLE PEOPLE, with their SOVEREIGN at

* 1 Kings viii. 22.

their head, to their Almighty Protector, their common Benefactor and Deliverer; for the dedication of ourselves, our souls and bodies, throughout the whole course of our future lives, to his worship, his service, his laws, and his religion. Nothing less than this can be any adequate return to our heavenly Father, for raising up our beloved Sovereign from the bed of sickness, and preserving to us, in his person, every thing that is dear and valuable to us, as Men, as Britons, and as Christians. For how is it possible, on such an occasion as the present, not to remember, or not to acknowledge, the many other invaluable blessings we possess, as well as that which compleats and confirms them all, that which we this day commemorate? Are we not as a people blest beyond example, and almost beyond belief? Do we not enjoy the purest mode of worship, the best constituted form of government, the most equal laws, the most able and most upright administration of justice? Are we not perfectly secure in our persons, our properties, our civil and religious liberties? Are not our manufactures flourishing, our population encreasing, our public burdens gradually lessening, our agriculture

agriculture highly improved, our commerce boundless? Are not the marks of peace, of comfort, of chearfulness, of affluence, visible on every side; and are not our credit, and reputation abroad, commensurate to our prosperity and happiness at home?

If this be a true picture of our situation, how can we ever express, as we ought, our thankfulness to the gracious Author of all these mercies? It is not the observance, it is not the devotion, however ardent, of a single day, that can be a sufficient evidence of our gratitude. The only sure and certain proof of our sincerity, is the reformation of our hearts, and the future holiness of our lives. This is a language which cannot be mistaken; a language, which speaks to the senses of mankind, and is sure of being heard and accepted at the Throne of Grace. In the exterior acts of worship, our hearts may not always accompany our lips. We may be lukewarm, inattentive, or insincere. But he, who from a principle of gratitude to Heaven, renounces those favourite sins, which most easily beset him, and devotes himself to the service of his Maker, can never be suspected of pretended sanctity

sanctity or hypocritical devotion. Here, then, at this solemn hour, and in this sacred place, when we are offering up our thanksgivings to God, let us, at the same time, sacrifice, at the foot of his altar, our vices, our follies, our passionate fondness for diversions, our excessive attachments to any pursuits that tend to draw off our affections from Heaven and heavenly things: and more especially our frequent, our growing profanations of that sacred day which our Maker claims AS HIS OWN; which is the great security and bulwark of our Religion; the great barrier against the inroad of secularity and dissipation; which ought never to be debased by unbecoming levities, by worldly occupations, by dangerous amusements, by any thing, in short, that tends to *desecrate* the Christian Sabbath, to obliterate that mark of discrimination, which divine authority, and primitive usage, have stamped upon it, and to sink it into the common mass of unhallowed days. It is a festival, we own, it is a most joyful festival; but it is a religious one too; and it should be observed, not with intemperate gaiety, nor yet with a gloomy and austere superstition, but with that rational piety, that
decent

decent, modest, chastised, and sober chearfulness, which so well becomes the character of the day; and which (with some exceptions) has, in fact, usually distinguished it in this kingdom. It is a distinction which does honour to us as a people. It is what few other Christian countries can boast. It is altogether worthy of the first Protestant Church in Europe; and no reasoning, no ridicule, no false ambition to imitate the freer manners of our neighbours on the continent, should ever induce us to give it up.

But, at the same time, let not external observances constitute the *whole* of our Religion; let us be Christians, not in name and appearance only, but in deed and in truth; and, above all, let us cultivate that heavenly spirit of meekness, gentleness, forbearance, candour, equity and charity, which is the distinguishing character of the Gospel, and which ought to mark distinctly every part of our conduct, both public and private. Let it instantly banish from our hearts "all bitterness, and
"wrath, and clamour, and anger, and evil-
"speaking, with all malice;" and let us become, what we have every reason upon earth

to become, a contented, a thankful, a united, a virtuous, a religious people. Let this place be the grave of every unchristian sentiment and passion; let this day be the æra of general harmony and concord. We have met here in joy; let us depart in peace. Let us, both as individuals and as members of the community (for the precept applies to us in *both* capacities, be “kind and tender-hearted one towards “another,” watchful over ourselves, respectful and dutiful to all our lawful superiors, grateful and obedient to God.

If these be our resolutions respecting our future conduct, we may then safely apply to ourselves that sublime benediction with which Solomon dismissed the people, when the great business of the dedication was closed. “May “the Lord our God be with us, as he was with “our fathers; let him not leave us or forsake “us. That he may incline our hearts unto “him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep “his commandments, and his statutes, and “his judgments, which he commanded our “fathers. And let these my words, where- “with I have made supplication before the “Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God, day “and

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“ and night, that he may maintain the cause
 “ of his servant, and the cause of his people,
 “ at all times, as the matter shall require.
 “ That all the people of the earth may know
 “ that the Lord is God, and that there is
 “ none else. Let your heart therefore be
 “ perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in
 “ his statutes, and to keep his commandments
 “ as at this day*.”

* 1 Kings viii. 57.

S E R M O N

"and right, that he may maintain the same."
 "of the law, and the grace of the law."
 "of the law, and the grace of the law."
 "I have the grace of the law, and I know
 that the law is good, and that there is
 more life in it than there is in the
 law of the Lord, and I will walk in
 the law of the Lord, and I will keep his
 commandments."

"I have the grace of the law, and I know
 that the law is good, and that there is
 more life in it than there is in the
 law of the Lord, and I will walk in
 the law of the Lord, and I will keep his
 commandments."

SERMON XVI.

LUKE X. 41, 42.

JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HER,
MARTHA, MARTHA, THOU ART CARE-
FUL AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY
THINGS, BUT ONE THING IS NEEDFUL;
AND MARY HATH CHOSEN THAT GOOD
PART WHICH SHALL NOT BE TAKEN
AWAY FROM HER.

WE are now once more arrived at the
commencement of that season*, which
the Church of England has set apart for the
purpose of enquiring into the state of our
account with God, of reviewing our past and
present way of thinking and acting with a
critical and searching eye; of looking well if
there be any way of wickedness in us, of turn-

* Lent,

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ing from it if there be, of confessing and lamenting our disobedience and ingratitude to our heavenly Father, of imploring his pardon, of entreating the assistance of his holy spirit, and under his guidance forming the most serious resolutions to correct and amend, without delay, whatever we find amiss in our temper, principles, and conduct. This is the true spirit and meaning of the religious solemnity of this day *, and the holy season which follows it; this is the substance and the essence of what is called in Scripture language, and in the epistle we have just heard, “turning to the Lord with weeping, fasting, and mourning.” And what is there in all this, but that sort of solicitude concerning our spiritual condition, and our future prospects, which every man of common sense, if he thinks them worth his notice, must see to be not only highly reasonable, but indispensably necessary? Is there a man who has any important end in view for the advancement of his fame, his fortune, his rank or consequence in life, who does not frequently think and reflect upon it, who does not give up a large share of his

* Ash Wednesday.

time

time and attention to it, who does not often shut himself up in his closet to consider whether he is in the right road to it, whether he is taking the most efficacious means to accomplish his end? We all know that this, and much more than this, is, and must be done, in such cases. And yet, in a case of infinitely greater moment, we conceive all this care and attention to be perfectly needless. We expect to go to Heaven without so much as giving ourselves the trouble to enquire, at proper intervals, whether we possess the qualifications required of all who are allowed to enter there; whether the course of action we are pursuing will lead us to the point we profess to have in view. The church calls upon us to give up a few hours at stated times, for a few weeks, to those great objects which we all acknowledge to be the most important that can engage the attention of a human being. But the world calls us another way; it calls us a thousand different ways; and which call is it that we obey? Look around and see what it is that now occupies, and is likely to occupy, for the next six weeks, the greater part of the inhabitants of this gay and

dissipated metropolis. Is it retirement, is it prayer, is it self-examination, is it repentance, is it prostration and humiliation of their souls before God? It is almost preposterous to ask the question. Some, it is true, there are, and, I trust, not a few, that have not yet bowed the knee to Baal; who have not yet fallen down before those idols of sin, of pleasure, of interest, of ambition, which the world has set up to worship; who love God with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; who dedicate not only this day and this season, but a large proportion of every day to his service, and pay an uniform and constant obedience to his commands. But great numbers, it cannot be denied, (would to God it could) pursue a very different course, and think it meaner to adore the God that made them. Far from rending either their hearts or their garments on such occasions as the present, they treat, with sovereign contempt, every ordinance of the church to which they belong; and this, above all others, they affect not only to despise, but to detest. They cannot bear, it seems, they shudder at the very thought, they cannot bear to draw down imprecations, such as the

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service

service of this day contains, on themselves and their neighbours, and to pronounce their own condemnation with their own mouths. Absurd and thoughtless men ! Do they, then, imagine, that if these imprecations are not sanctioned by their own lips, they will be of no avail ? From whom do they originally proceed ? From God himself. They are the terrors, not of man, but of the Lord. And do the threatnings of God want the confirmation of man, before they can take effect ? Will not the unmerciful, the drunkard, the extortioner, the fornicator, the adulterer, the murderer, the curser of his father and his mother, will not these, and all the rest of the black catalogue of sinners enumerated this day, receive their due punishment hereafter, if *you* are only so tender-hearted, and so indulgent, as not to pronounce their sentence here ? Alas ! that sentence is already pronounced by their Almighty Judge. It is recorded in the books of Heaven ; and though every tongue on earth were silent, nay, though every tongue should join in glossing over, and even justifying all or any of these crimes, that sentence will assuredly be pronounced on all impenitent offenders.

Deceive not, then, yourselves with any such vain imagination, as if any thing you could say, or forbear to say, would alter one iota in the judicial decrees of the Almighty Sovereign of the universe. There is, indeed, one thing that can change them. But that depends not on you, but on the sinner himself. It depends not on what he says, but on what he does. "When the wicked man turneth away
" from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and
" right, he shall save his soul alive*." This is the only way of averting those dreadful maledictions you have this day heard denounced; and it is to bring men to this way, to stamp upon their souls a strong conviction of the danger of sin, and the necessity of a speedy repentance, that our church has thought fit to make use of such strong and impressive terms. It does not, it must be owned, prophecy smooth things. It does not, in a mortal disease, deceive and flatter the patient with soft and soothing palliatives. It tells him what, in his condition, it is highly fitting he should know, the plain truth in plain words.

* Ezek. xviii. 27.

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It selects, out of Scripture itself, the most awakening admonitions which that sacred book contains. It makes use of that inspired language which is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, which probes our wounds to the bottom, and reaches the most secret maladies of the heart. In fact, almost the whole of the service of this day, which has been so often, and so unjustly censured, is expressed in the very words of Scripture; and whoever thinks fit either to condemn or to ridicule it, is not condemning the English liturgy, but the word of God.

But I am, perhaps, taking up too much of your time in combating this pretended objection to the forms of the day. The real objection, I apprehend, does not lie here. It lies much deeper. When so much pains are taken to find fault with words and phrases taken from holy writ, it creates a strong suspicion, that all is not as it should be in another place. Let us confess the truth. The fault is not in our Common Prayer-books, but in our hearts. "My brethren, if our hearts
" condemn us not, then have we confidence

“ towards God* ;” then shall we have confidence to look his terrors steadily in the face, and to join, without fear, in the strongest denunciations against sin that the church can prescribe to us. But if our hearts condemn us, if they reproach us with habitually indulging irregular desires of wealth, of pleasure, or of power, with neglecting or insulting our Maker, and trampling under foot his most sacred laws, no wonder that our lips tremble, and our souls sink within us, while we repeat his awful judgments against such offences. The true way, then, to remove all obstacles to a proper intercourse between God and us, at this time, and at all times, is to pluck up from our hearts those evil habits, and criminal passions, that bar up our access to the throne of grace. The chief impediments to this intercourse are vice, pleasure, and business. The two first of these I have considered in some former discourses from this place †. The last will be the subject of what I have now to offer to your consideration.

* 1 John iii. 21.

† See the Sermon on the Love of Pleasure in the first volume, and Sermon xiii. in this.

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With this view I have chosen the history of the two sisters Martha and Mary; a history with which you are all so perfectly well acquainted, that it is needless to recite the particulars of it. Martha, we know, was so overwhelmed with family cares and embarrassments, so immoderately anxious to provide an entertainment worthy of her illustrious guest, so *cumbered*, as our version very energetically expresses it, *with much serving*, that, like many others engaged in the bustle of active life, she conceived the business she was employed in to be the most important of all human concerns. She fancied that every thing else ought to give way to it, and that her sister Mary was most miserably wasting her time by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening to his heavenly conversation. How astonished, then, and mortified must she be, when, on calling out for her sister to help her, she received from our Lord that well-known reproof, mingled, however, with the most affectionate and salutary advice to her, and to all those that happen to entertain similar sentiments, and to be in similar circumstances, with herself. “ Martha,

“ Martha, thou art careful and troubled about

“many things, but one thing is needful; and
“Mary hath chosen that good part, which
“shall not be taken away from her.”

The one thing needful, then, we see, is an earnest desire of spiritual instruction and spiritual improvement, or, in other words, a serious and constant regard to our everlasting welfare.

But how few are there, in comparison, who uniformly act on these principles; and what multitudes, on the contrary, are there who are so completely entangled in the various occupations of a busy and a tumultuous life, that they are, like Martha, much more disposed to cry out for help in their worldly employments, than to take away any part of their attention from them to bestow on the concerns of another life.

That the pursuits these people are engaged in may be both important and necessary, I mean not to controvert or deny; but the question, then, is, which is *most* important and *most* necessary, the business of this life, or the business of the next. If our temporal and spiritual interests happen to interfere, we are not, I think, any where commanded to give
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the preference to our worldly concerns. It may be said, perhaps, that it would be very ridiculous to sit still, and leave our temporal affairs to Providence, expecting that God should feed and clothe us, as he feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field. But it would, I am sure, be more ridiculous, and *much* more dangerous, to leave our spiritual welfare to God, that we might, in the mean while, carry on our worldly business without interruption. We have abundantly more reason to hope, that life may be supported without incessant toil and drudgery, than that we should arrive at Heaven without setting one foot forwards ourselves in the way that leads to it. We are told by Christ himself, that if we seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all those things (that are really necessary) shall be added unto us.* But we are nowhere told, that if we seek first the things of this world, the kingdom of God, and all its immortal glories, shall be thrown into our hands, without any efforts on our part to obtain them. Eternal life, and endless felicity, are not things of such very small consequence,

* Matth. vi. 33.

as to be given us gratuitously over and above what we can acquire in this world, by bestowing our whole attention upon it.

Let it be remembered, too, when we are comparing this life and the next, that in pursuit of our present interests, be our industry ever so great, we may chance to fail of success. The most indefatigable worldling that ever lived, may, after all his drudgery, be disappointed of his aim ; may, by a thousand accidents not in his power to foresee, or prevent, be deprived of the fruits of his labours, or rendered incapable of enjoying them. And when he has lost this world, he has lost every thing. He has no share or inheritance in the next. He has taken no pains concerning it, and can therefore expect nothing from it. He can draw from it no support or consolation under the loss he has sustained. Whereas the truly devout and religious man has no reason to be in any pain about his temporal affairs. If they succeed, it is very well ; it is so much clear gains : he has only given them a second place in his thoughts ; he has lost nothing for the sake of them ; his condition, in this life, is so much the better ; his prospects hereafter

hereafter not at all the worse. If his views here are frustrated, he has something to comfort him; he has secured a happiness in reversion, which cannot be taken away from him; he is not afraid of any evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast and believeth in the Lord. Nay, even supposing the very worst that can happen; supposing he should, by his attention to Religion, be reduced to the most deplorable condition that can befall mortality, so as that the body should perish, whilst he is consulting the health of his soul; the only consequence of this last and most grievous calamity would be, to put him in immediate possession of that treasure, which he had been so industriously laying up in Heaven. But if the man of business, on the contrary, whilst he is heaping together the good things of this world, should receive his final summons to another, it then behoves him to consider not only "whose
" those things shall be which he has provided," but what the lot of his soul shall be for which nothing is provided. It is a serious, it is an alarming consideration, to be summoned unexpectedly to answer for his conduct, without having once examined it; to
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enter upon a state of eternity, without the least preparation made for it. Yet such is but too often the case of that infatuated man, who (as it is expressed in the parable) layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God; who, in the foolish security of his heart, says to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But in the very midst of this his senseless confidence, and visionary plans of future happiness, he is snatched away with that deserved and dreadful taunt, (the prelude only of something still more dreadful) "thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee *."

If, then, either our temporal or spiritual interests must be entirely neglected for the sake of advancing the other, there can be no doubt which ought to give place. But the truth is, they are both perfectly consistent, and may, with the utmost ease, be carried on very amicably together. The Scripture no where forbids us to make a comfortable provision for ourselves, our families, and our friends; on the contrary, it enjoins it. What it condemns,

* Luke xii. 20.

is only such an intemperate pursuit of worldly things, as is destructive of all Religion, and not such a prudent and moderate regard to them as the calls of nature, of justice, and of humanity, demand. These calls must be properly attended to, these duties must be fulfilled, to render us capable of any others; and all the Gospel requires is, that they should be made subservient to our everlasting happiness.

It is true, that some men must necessarily, from their indigence in private, or their elevation in public life, be more involved in cares than the rest of the world. But still we may, in the busiest scenes, find certain breaks and intervals, or if we do not *find*, we ought to *make* them, which eagerly seized, and properly applied, will, through the merits of our Redeemer, make our final calling and election sure.

Some of the most essential duties of Religion consume no time at all. To keep ourselves unspotted from the world, to abstain from intemperance and sensuality, from falsehood and detraction, to do no injury to our neighbour, to suppress all anger, malice, and revenge, does not, in any degree, interfere
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with our usual occupations. We may do a kind action just as easily and expeditiously as we can do a cruel one; nay, generally, with infinitely less pain and trouble to ourselves; and, by a charitable donation judiciously bestowed, we may make a fellow-creature happy in an instant, without the least interruption to business. By selecting the best and worthiest men for the management of our concerns, we may give countenance to virtue, and fix a brand upon vice. By renouncing all the secret craft of the world, and all the sinister, though not unusual, methods of accumulating wealth, we may give the strongest proofs of our integrity. By contenting ourselves with the reasonable emoluments of our professions, and our employments, we may make our moderation known unto all men. By refusing to take advantage of public scarcity and distress, and disdaining to raise ourselves on the ruin of our fellow-creatures, we may display to the whole world a generous and disinterested love of our country. We may, in short, by a thousand instances of this kind, "make to ourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness," and whether we eat, or drink, or work,

work, or whatever we do, may do it all in such a manner as to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of our own souls.

Then, as to the positive duties of Religion, and the offices of piety and devotion, we can all of us spare one day in seven, at least, for the performance of them. By this we lose no ground in the race for riches and honours, because most of our competitors lose equally; and they who spend it in idleness and debauchery lose more. We can all of us snatch a little time at morning, and at evening, and at noon-day, for conversing with our Maker and ourselves. We can all of us, in the very midst of our hurry, send up a short prayer, or a silent ejaculation to the throne of grace; whilst our hands are employed, our hearts may be with God; whilst our conversation is on earth, our thoughts and affections may be in Heaven. No man, in short, can possibly, except by his own fault, be so circumstanced as to want the time that is indispensably necessary for working out his salvation. In cases of necessity, we must do what we can, when we cannot do all we wish. We are sometimes obliged to give up to business part
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of the time allotted for the refreshment of our bodies; but still we take care to give them what is absolutely necessary for their support. In the same manner, though we cannot always indulge ourselves in long and regular exercises of piety and devotion, yet should we never fail to feed and keep alive, at least, our sense of Religion by occasional supplies of spiritual nourishment. Such transient refreshments are often the sweetest, because we come to them with an appetite, and more will be sometimes done in them by men of quickness and dispatch, than in whole years languished out by the monastic drone in solitude and indolence.

But instead of making use of every opportunity that offers; instead of conforming to those occasional seasons of retirement which the church has thrown in their way, men of business are apt to deceive themselves with resolutions of retreating some time or other from the world, in order to give themselves up to God and Religion without interruption. Under this persuasion they postpone the settlement of their accounts with Heaven, till the wished-for time arrives, when they shall have

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nothing

nothing else to engage their thoughts. This is an error so very common, even to men of the best sense and the best intentions, that it well deserves a moment's consideration, before we dismiss this subject.

And yet, it is very surprising, that so many should fall into this snare, when every one may see, from daily experience, that these resolutions are scarce ever effectually carried into execution. And, indeed, how can it be expected? It is the very nature of worldly pursuits to draw us on insensibly from one thing to another, contrary to our conviction, and even sometimes contrary to our inclination.

The ambitious man reaches what he thinks the summit of his wishes; but this summit, when gained, he finds will serve as a step to some higher point, which makes his present situation seem little in his eyes. As he rises higher, he sees clearer and further; he condemns his first contracted views, and enlarges his desires as his prospects open. It is the same in the accumulation of wealth, as in the acquisition of power. There is always a certain sum we wish to compass, a certain design

we wish to accomplish. That design is accomplished, but our wishes are not compleated. By thus having our eyes constantly fixed on some distant object, they are perpetually taken off from ourselves, and we never want a reason for neglecting our duty, till it becomes too late to think of it.

Let me not, however, be understood as meaning by this to discourage in men of the world a real desire of breaking away from the incumbrance of business, and dedicating themselves in earnest to the service of God and the duties of Religion. I mean only to caution them against delusive and abortive projects of this nature; against trusting all their hopes of future acceptance to distant and visionary plans of retirement, and, in the mean time, living without God in the world. This is a risque to which no wise man ought to expose his most important interests. But if you sincerely wish to disengage yourself, at a convenient opportunity, from the cares and toils of a laborious occupation, think a little of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the danger of long procrastination. Let the period of your retreat be fixed in due time, and resolutely

lutely observed ; and let it not be delayed from day to day till your health, and spirits, and vigour of mind and body, are gone ; and all taste and relish for serious reflections, and heavenly meditations, are utterly extinguished in your breast. To prevent this, you must give up the world, before the world gives up you ; you must be decisive and immoveable in the plan you have formed, and the time you have marked out for its execution ; and, in the mean while, in the very midst of your business, you must preserve some intercourse with your Maker, “ some communion with your own heart.” You must seize with eagerness, and employ with alacrity, the few moments you have to spare from business, in cultivating devout sentiments and virtuous habits, and sowing silently and imperceptibly, in your soul, the seeds of eternal life. You will then be prepared for the true enjoyment of a religious retreat ; you will feel nothing of that vacancy and languor, that disappointment and regret, which retirement frequently produces in minds long debased by low cares and sordid pursuits, and which have brought the thing itself into disgrace and

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contempt. You will, on the contrary, find full employment in cultivating and bringing to maturity the good seed that has already begun to spring up in your heart, and will be continually acquiring greater strength of mind, greater firmness of principle, greater uniformity of practice. Having already made yourself *acquainted* with God, you will feel yourself no stranger in his presence, but will, with humble confidence, commit yourself, and all your concerns, to his gracious guidance and protection. You will have leisure to improve your intercourse with him by frequent prayer, and to contemplate his power, his wisdom, his goodness, in his astonishing works of creation and redemption, in his providential care of the universe; in his daily mercies to yourself in particular.

By meditations such as these, you will find an ardent love of God kindling in your soul. Your mind will gradually detach itself from the present scene, and raise itself to Heaven and heavenly things. Your passions will become every day more tranquil and composed; your affections more spiritual and refined; your thoughts more elevated; your prospects
more

more noble and exhilarating: and the peace, the comfort, the delight, you will experience in a retirement such as this, can only be exceeded by those pure, celestial joys hereafter, to which they will be a prelude and an introduction.

SERMON XVII.

PROVERBS iii. 27.

WITHHOLD NOT GOOD FROM THEM TO
WHOM IT IS DUE, WHEN IT IS IN THE
POWER OF THINE HAND TO DO IT.

WHEN we reflect on that general turn to acts of charity and humanity which is so observable in this country, it may perhaps appear perfectly needless to recommend to our hearers the injunction contained in the text. If they are so well disposed, as it should seem they are, to do good, to what purpose are they exhorted not to withhold it from them to whom it is due? And, indeed, if there was no other way of doing good but that of relieving the indigent, there would not often, it must be owned, be much occasion to urge the practice of this duty. But we must not

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flatter ourselves, that when we have distributed to the necessitous all the wealth we can spare, we have done every thing that the love of our neighbour requires at our hands. At the best, we have only performed one part, and that a small part, of the great, the ROYAL LAW*, (as it is called) of CHRISTIAN CHARITY, which involves a great variety of most important and useful acts of kindness to our fellow-creatures. Several of these, though extremely easy and obvious, are, for that very reason, perhaps, apt to be overlooked. Some of them, therefore, I shall beg leave, at present, to suggest to your thoughts, from whence the two following good consequences, among others, may arise. The great and the wealthy will see, that to be truly benevolent, something more is necessary than liberality to the poor. And they who are in a humbler station of life, and who on that account are apt to lament their inability to do good, will find that there are many roads to beneficence still open to them; and that scarce any one, however low or indigent, can want *opportunities* of doing good, if he will but honestly make use of them.

* James ii. 8.

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I. First, then, there is a negative kind of benevolence, which it is most certainly in every man's power to exercise if he pleases; and that is, ABSTINENCE FROM MISCHIEF. As the first step towards wisdom is to avoid error, and towards happiness to feel no pain, so the first advance towards benevolence is to do no harm. It may seem, perhaps, a great impropriety of expression to dignify this with the name of benevolence. But if benevolence consists, as it certainly does, in contributing to the comfort and happiness of our fellow-creatures, there is not any one act of humanity, that will operate so effectually and extensively to this end, as refraining from every thing that can offend, distress, or injure others. By far the greatest part of the misery we see in the world, arises not so much from omitting acts of kindness, as from committing acts of unkindness and cruelty; and were all these to cease at once, the effect on the general happiness of mankind would be somewhat similar to that inexpressible comfort we experience in ourselves on the removal of some violent pain. Think only what infinite mischief arises from peevishness, ill-nature, and pride; from de-
traction,

traction, falsehood, deceit, and treachery; from fraud and oppression; from envy, hatred, anger, lust, ambition, revenge, and the whole infernal family of malevolent passions. Annihilate all the evils that arise from these sources, and this world would be a paradise. Every other kind of charity would be almost unnecessary. For it is the chief business of human compassion, to heal those wounds which human malignity is constantly inflicting. How much, then, is it to be lamented, that this most important branch of charity is not more attended to, than it seems to be! There is no one character in the world, which men are in general so ambitious of having ascribed to them, as that of good-nature and benevolence. With some (especially those that reject Christianity, but profess themselves friends to virtue) this is deemed not merely the first of human duties, but the only one worth their notice; the one thing needful, the sum and substance of all morality and religion. One should naturally suppose, therefore, that this virtue at least, this favourite and fashionable virtue, would be perfectly well understood and practised, and every

every the minutest branch of it most assiduously cultivated and improved. But how far this is from being the case, is but too apparent. The common pretence to it is seldom any thing more than a little constitutional easiness of temper, a sociability of disposition, and a thoughtless, indiscriminate, perhaps even pernicious liberality. On these grounds do great numbers fancy themselves the kindest, the gentlest, the most benevolent of human beings. And yet, at the same time, these men of benevolence will not scruple, perhaps, where their own interest is concerned, to oppress and harass their inferiors without the least feelings of compassion or remorse, to invade their clearest rights, disregard their most equitable claims, distress them with expensive and tedious litigations, and crush them with the weight of their wealth and power. If envy or ambition, if prejudice or party, if spleen or resentment, inflame their minds, they will say sometimes the bitterest and the cruellest things of those whom they happen to dislike, will calumniate the fairest and most unblemished characters, will misrepresent the best intentioned actions and designs, and give way
to

to such a vehemence of temper and conduct as is utterly inconsistent with all true benevolence. If softer passions take possession of them, these they will often indulge to the very utmost, let what will be the consequence, let who will be the sufferer. The dignity of virtuous innocence, the peace and comfort of families, the ties of friendship, the laws of hospitality, the sanctity of plighted vows, the happiness of those whom they are bound by the most solemn engagements to cherish and to protect, all these, and a thousand other no less sacred obligations, are trifles to them, are brushed away like the morning dew, when they stand in the way of their desires; and multitudes must be made wretched for ever, that they may be triumphant for one moment. And yet, if the slightest injury or insult be offered to themselves, they take fire in an instant; they pursue the offender with inextinguishable fury and rancour, and, whilst they are violating every hour the maxims of true honour, will sacrifice to notions of false honour the life of the dearest friend they have in the world. Let not these, let not any such as these, ever pretend to talk of humanity or benevolence.

benevolence. They are ignorant of its first principles, and have the very rudiments of true Christian charity yet to learn. Though to some persons, and on some occasions, they may perhaps be generous and kind; yet if they are dissolute, oppressive, implacable, vindictive, the misery they occasion by these vices will infinitely outweigh all the good they do in other instances, and justly denominate them hard-hearted and inhuman.

II. The very first duty, then, of the benevolent man, is to do harm to no one. Then let him go on to do good to as many as he can. And he *may* do good to more persons, and in more cases, than he is perhaps aware of. What numberless opportunities, for instance, are there of making others happy in the daily commerce of life (especially in its nearest and tenderest connections) by an easy, affable, condescending, gentle, encouraging behaviour and conversation. We may say and do the most trivial things, in such a manner as to give almost as much pleasure to those with whom we constantly live and converse, as we could do by the most substantial acts of kindness. And let not this be thought unworthy the

the attention of a Christian assembly. Scripture itself commands us *to be courteous**, and the manners of our blessed Lord were not only mild and gentle, but graceful and captivating. This was the natural result of his unbounded benevolence, which is indeed the best, the only sure and solid foundation of true *URBANITY*. Without real, undissembled good-will to others, either from principle or constitution, there can be no such thing as a constant desire to please; and without such a desire always present to our minds, it is impossible we *should* please. Whoever, therefore, wishes to render himself universally beloved and admired, must not merely *seem* benevolent; he must be really so. When once he is, every thing else will generally follow of course, without difficulty, without effort, without the least occasion for art, disguise, or management†. When all is goodness within, all must be gracious and engaging without. When there is a fountain of genuine kindness in the soul, it will naturally and spontaneously diffuse itself to every the minutest part of our behaviour.

* 1 Pet. iii. 8.

† Such as we see recommended in the letters of a late noble Earl to his son.

III. They who have had much experience in the world, may be of infinite use to those who have had but little, by giving them wise, and seasonable, and salutary advice; by rectifying their crude, mistaken notions of men and things; by instructing them in the real value of the blessings and the evils both of this life and the next; by pointing out to them the road they are to take, the objects they are to pursue; by guarding them against those hasty friendships, and ruinous connections, which they are but too apt to form; by teaching them, in fine, to distinguish properly between trivial, showy, superficial accomplishments, and those solid, substantial attainments, both intellectual, moral, and religious, which ought to engage the chief attention of a rational and immortal being. This world is a wide and turbulent ocean, full of rocks and shoals; and there cannot be a kinder or more useful thing than to furnish those who are ready to launch out upon it with a proper chart and compass to direct their course. There are few persons who have not, in some part of their lives, abundant opportunities of exercising their benevolence and good-nature, in this way, towards the thoughtless and inexperienced.

perienced. And they must have little feeling, indeed, who can see a poor giddy wretch running headlong down a precipice, without stretching out a friendly hand to snatch him from destruction.

IV. But if we are afraid of being thought meddling and officious, and of provoking enmity, where friendship only was meant, there is another method of instructing and benefiting others, which cannot possibly give offence; and that is, A GOOD EXAMPLE. A regular, virtuous, religious life, besides all the good it does in other respects, is a constant lesson of morality to all around us. It is a silent, insinuating kind of advice, which steals unobserved into the mind; and its operations, though imperceptible, are commonly most effectual. Living under the influence of a bright example is to the soul, what breathing a pure and wholesome air is to the body. We find ourselves mended and improved and invigorated by both, without any sensible impression made upon us, without perceiving how the happy change is brought about. When people offer us advice in form, it seems to argue a kind of superiority which sometimes piques and

and offends us. We are apt to set ourselves, out of mere pride, to fence and fight against it, and can scarce ever be ingenuous enough to own ourselves in the wrong when any one *presumes* to tell us that we are so? But we cannot possibly be angry at a man for taking care of his own conduct, for going on in the right road himself, and leaving us to follow him or not, as we think fit. When virtue is thus made visible in human form, its charms are too powerful to be resisted: Instead of applying to the understanding, it makes its way directly to the heart; and when that is once gained over, all difficulty is at an end. Here, then, is a way of doing good, which is equally in the power of the greatest man and the meanest. He has nothing to do but to go quietly on in the path of duty, and he will be followed by multitudes, on whom neither argument, nor persuasion, would ever make the slightest impression.

But though every one may thus make his light shine most usefully before men, yet the higher this light is placed, the wider will be its sphere, and the more extensive its influence.

They, therefore, who by their birth, their station, their power, their wealth, their profession, their abilities, are set, as it were, upon an eminence, and held up to the observation of the world, are more especially bound to take heed to their ways, since the good or the harm they may do by their conduct is inconceivable. It is very well known, that the lower orders of men almost constantly take the cast and colour of their lives from those above them. The manners of the people, therefore, are to a great degree in the hands of their superiors, and may be moulded by them into whatever form they please. What a noble opportunity of doing good does this afford to those superiors! An opportunity which, to every man of benevolence, of public spirit, nay, even of any honest ambition, must be such a *temptation* to right conduct, as one would think it impossible for him to withstand. What a fair and obvious path to reputation and applause is here marked out to the upper part of the world! How easy is it for them to merit, and to obtain, a place amongst the most distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind, *merely by living as they ought*; by being as eminently

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good,

good, as they are eminently great. There are, it must be confessed, numbers who are really so; and were those numbers to encrease in the proportion they might and ought, we should soon see the infinite utility of such examples. It is an experiment that well deserves to be tried in its utmost extent, and the reward would amply repay the labour. For surely there is no gratification that wealth or power can bestow, equal to the feelings which THEY must have, who see multitudes of their fellow-creatures growing every day better and happier under their hands. It can be exceeded only by the unspeakable joy they will experience hereafter, when they perceive themselves surrounded in the realms of light by those who have been brought there principally by their means; whose grateful transports will overwhelm them with delight, and for whose virtues they will be rewarded as well as for their own.

V. Another very easy and unexpensive method of being serviceable to others is, by vindicating the characters of those that have been unjustly defamed and traduced. If the injured persons are strangers to us, it is generous and

noble to stand up in their defence. If they are our friends, we are bound by the most sacred ties to repel the insults offered to their good name. If they are set in authority over us, it is our duty to rescue them from the obloquy which we know they do not merit. In all these respects we have, it must be owned at present, an ample field for our benevolence to work in. With opportunities of doing good in *this* way, we are, indeed, most liberally furnished by the licence and malevolence of the age. For surely it is doing it no injustice to say, that one of its most distinguishing features is an intemperance in calumny, an indiscriminate wantonness of defamation, of which no other country, no other period even in this country, furnishes any example. It becomes, then, every friend to humanity, or even to common justice, to set himself with the utmost earnestness against this most unchristian fury of detraction. He can hardly do a greater kindness to individuals, or a more substantial service to the public, than by discouraging and repressing to the utmost every groundless slander, every unmerited reproach, let who will be the object, whether in the highest employments or the most private stations of life.

VI. But

VI. But though in these and many other instances that might be mentioned, we may do most essential service to our fellow-creatures, yet they who have the strongest claim on our benevolence are undoubtedly the afflicted and distressed. To these, when pecuniary relief is all they want, it should certainly be administered in proportion to their necessities, to our circumstances, and the right they have to expect assistance from us. But it frequently happens, that the kindness they stand in need of is of a very different nature. Sometimes they require nothing more than a little support and countenance against some petty tyrant, that "deviseeth mischief continually*." Sometimes they have undeservedly lost the affections of their best friend, whom they wish to regain. Sometimes they seek in vain admission to those who can alone effectually assist them. Sometimes a load of grief lies heavy on their minds, which calls for some compassionate hand to lighten or remove it, by consolation, by advice, by encouragement, by sympathy and condolence, by every tender care, every soothing expression that humanity

* Proverbs vi. 14.

can dictate. In all these cases, and a multitude of others that might be mentioned, true benevolence will accommodate itself to the various distresses that fall in its way; will, with a versatility truly admirable, “become all things to all men,” and assume as many different shapes as there are modes of misery in the world. It will compose the differences of friends; it will arrest the violence of enemies; it will bring back the ungrateful child to a sense of his duty, the offended parent to the feelings of affection; “it will visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; it will rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep;” it will protect the helpless and the weak; will exert its influence, will exhaust its powers in redressing their injuries, and vindicating their rights; it will facilitate their access to the seats of justice; it will knock for them at the doors of the great; it will raise them up friends, where they could never have thought of looking for them; it will be as Aaron was to Moses, “a mouth to them*,” it will speak those wants which they are unable to represent, and

* Ex. iv. 16.

plead for them with an eloquence which nothing can resist. The man of charity, in short, will not merely content himself with giving alms ; he will give what people are often more unwilling to give, his attention, his thoughts, his care, his friendship, his protection. These are so many instruments of beneficence that God puts into our hands for the benefit of others. These were intended to supply the place of wealth ; and will, in many cases, relieve distresses which wealth cannot reach.

To enter into a minute detail of all the various ways in which we may benefit mankind would be endless, and, indeed, in a great measure needless. For whoever is possessed with a sincere desire to do good, will have no occasion for a monitor to suggest to him when and where he shall exert it. He will be no less quick in discerning, than eager in embracing every opportunity of exercising his benevolence. I shall therefore content myself with mentioning, in conclusion, only one more way of manifesting our good will to mankind ; which is in a very high degree important and beneficial ; which lies as much within the reach of the lowest as the highest ; and which

yet both high and low are, I fear, but too apt to neglect; I mean, RECOMMENDING OUR BRETHREN TO GOD IN PRAYER.

Let not the Philosopher smile at this! It is not to him I speak. HE, I know, is infinitely above the meanness of paying any homage to the great Creator and Governor of the world. He disdains to pray even for his own welfare; how, then, should he ever think of imploring blessings upon others? How can he be expected to love his neighbour better than himself! He laughs at the idea of a particular providence, which regulates the minutest movements both of the natural and the moral world, and consequently looks on prayer as the idlest and most useless employment in which a human creature can be engaged. Let us leave him, then, to the enjoyment of that comfortable state of which he has made choice; turned adrift (as he must suppose himself) into a wide world, and abandoned to the caprice of chance and fortune, without protector, guide, or comforter; without any Almighty Friend to apply to for himself, or those he holds most dear, when exposed to dangers, or involved in calamities, where all

human help is vain. Here, I say, let us leave him; and let us devoutly thank God that we are not Philosophers. Let us thank God that our belief of this most important doctrine of a particular providence is founded, not on the cobweb subtleties of human science, but on that solid, immoveable rock, the Gospel of Christ.

The Scripture informs us, that he who first created the world, still continues to preserve it; that he is "about our path and about our bed," "and spieth out all our ways *;" that, "without his knowledge not a sparrow falls to the ground, and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered †." To this gracious and Almighty Being we are commanded to pray, and that not only for ourselves but for others also. "Pray one for another," says St. James. "Let supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men ‡." "Seek the peace of the city where you live, and pray unto the Lord for it ||." What a pleasing, what a spacious field of benevolence is here opened to the Christian, from which the unbeliever (who yet, of all others, boasts

* Psalm cxxxix. 2.

† Matthew x. 29, 30.

‡ 1 Timothy ii. 1.

|| Jeremiah xxix. 7.

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the most of his benevolence) absolutely shuts himself out. We think it a strong mark of our regard, to recommend those we love to some great and powerful friend, who is able to support and advance them in the world. But what earthly support or protection is to be compared to HIS, who has all the powers of nature, and all the events of futurity, at his command, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and "turneth them whithersoever he will *." What a privilege, what an honour, what an indulgence is it, that we are *allowed* to commit those we love to his care and guardianship; and that we can do it without raising up a rival in his affections! In the arms of his mercy there is room for all. He can embrace in them, at once, the whole race of mankind; and the more we intercede in our prayers for others, the surer are we of his kindness to ourselves. To him we seldom fail to have recourse in our own distress. There are cases in which we fly to him by a kind of instinctive impulse; in which without the utmost violence, we cannot *restrain* ourselves from prayer. If then we have any real good will to our fellow-creatures,

* Prov. xxi. 1.

we shall implore the same mercies, and with the same earnestness, for them that we do for ourselves. If we have any love for our country, we shall not fail to give it a place in our devotions, and to pray most ardently for the prosperity and stability of our Jerusalem.

In what manner our prayers can be granted, or by what means God can avert calamity from those we recommend to his protection, without doing violence to what is called the ordinary course of nature, it is no concern of ours to enquire. If God has commanded us to pray for others, it is our business not to philosophize, but to obey. Let us give ourselves no trouble about the course of nature. It is perfectly safe in the hands of its divine Author. There may be no difficulties to Omnipotence, where we see nothing but impossibilities. Let us leave God to manage his own world, and perform his promises, as he certainly will, in his own way. All we have to do is, to make a faithful use of that valuable privilege of INTERCESSION, which he has graciously allowed us for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. The most indigent man may say to his neighbour, as St. Peter did to the cripple at the gate of the

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the temple, "silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee*." My wishes, my intercessions, my prayers you shall have. On earth, indeed, I can do nothing; but I will try to move HEAVEN in your favour. This puts it into the power of the meanest member of society, if he is but religious and devout, to be as essentially useful, both to individuals and to the community, as those that fill the highest and most active stations of life. From the deepest solitude, and from the humblest cell, his prayers may reach the throne of God; may there touch one of those celestial springs that set the world in motion; may be among the reasons that induce the Almighty to give a new turn to the great wheels of the universe, and to rescue individuals, families, and empires, from destruction. Improbable, and even ridiculous, as this may seem to the profound reasoners of this world, the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, are full of the powerful prevalence and astonishing effects of prayer; and unless we absolutely renounce all faith in the Gospel, and all confidence in the promises of Christ, we must admit the truth of this doctrine; we must acknowledge, that

* Acts iii. 6.

“ the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous
 “ man,” either for himself, or for others,
 “ availeth much *.”

Let then, every sincere Christian, unmoved by the cavils of the sophist, or the insults of the scorner, steadily and resolutely persevere in that most benevolent office of INTERCEDING for all mankind. Let him beseech the great Sovereign of the Universe to enlighten the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to confirm the doubtful, to convert the infidel, to reclaim the profligate, to soften the unmerciful, to restrain the violent and vindictive, to redress the injured and oppressed, to protect the innocent; to reconcile the interests and calm the passions of contending individuals and hostile nations; to avert from this hitherto favoured land those bitter evils with which other countries are now so cruelly desolated and overwhelmed; to direct the councils and prosper the just designs of those whom Providence has set over us; to unite the hearts of those they govern, as the heart of one man, in sentiments of Christian charity, and constitutional obedience. Let him implore, in fine,

* James v. 16.

(as he naturally will) the peculiar blessing of the Almighty on those he holds most dear; that, as our Liturgy very sublimely expresses it, "through his most mighty protection, both here and ever, they may be preserved both in body and soul; and that he being their ruler and guide, they may so pass through things temporal as finally to lose not the things that are eternal."

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